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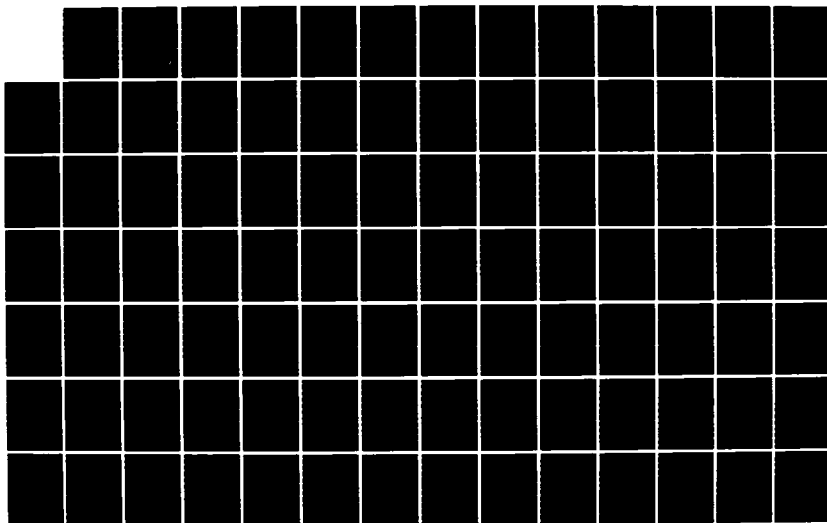
THE ROLE OF THE POLISH INTERNAL SECURITY CORPS IN THE
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THE ROLE OF THE
POLISH INTERNAL SECURITY CORPS IN
THE OCTOBER CRISIS OF 1956

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INTRODUCTION

➤ This thesis, compiled entirely from open source material, traces the history of the Polish Internal Security Corps (Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego), as the KBW, from 1945 to 1956. It examines the origins, the development and the utilization of the KBW during the October Crisis of 1956. The deployment of the KBW during the October Crisis was of particular importance because it was the first time since World War II that Poland refused to accept blindly the mandates of her Soviet masters and, instead, followed her instincts as a nation on the brink of freedom.

Since the mid-thirteenth century, when Batu Khan led his fierce Tartars into what is now eastern Europe, Poland has enjoyed relatively little national stability. Decade-long clashes with aggressive military neighbors were interspersed with attempts to grasp a peace which has always seemed just beyond Poland's reach. As the centuries passed, the Tartars left and the Swedes came, only to be replaced by the Prussians and the Austrians and finally, by the modern-day Soviets.

Until the Second World War, Poland had managed to keep abreast of military technology and tactics to the extent that she was capable of defending herself to some degree. Even when her borders were transgressed by hostile occupation forces, Poland's internal resolve had manifested itself throughout the centuries in the extraordinary courage and resourcefulness of her own armed forces. Whether traditional or guerrilla, Polish armies had somehow managed to keep the flame of

national pride and independence burning brightly even in the darkest of times.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler's blitzkrieg changed the face of warfare. Poland's cavalry units, devastating in equal combat, proved no match for German Panzer units. A stunned world watched as victorious Nazi armies occupied Poland's capitol only thirty days after the invasion began. Throughout the turbulent war years, Poland saw her armed forces decimated. Still, even within Poland's defeat and domination, special military forces, such as those commanded by the legendary guerilla leader "Hubal" instilled a pride that seemed to overcome the humiliation of foreign occupation.

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At the conclusion of the Second World War, the Soviets brought a very different kind of occupation to Poland. The flame of national independence was all but extinguished by Stalin's Red Army. In 1944, Poland was formally occupied by Soviet forces and relegated to a carbon-copy existence of the same Marxist principles which controlled life in the Soviet Union. The Soviet occupation of Poland exceeded simple control by traditional military forces.

In order to insure unquestioned compliance with communist doctrine, Stalin authorized the development of a secret police organization in Poland. This organization, advised and led by seasoned Soviet State Security (KGB) personnel, was made up of Polish citizens whose loyalty to Marxist ideology was beyond reproach. Soviet manipulation of this organization seemed to negate the already remote possibility of forming

any sort of alliance which would pose a direct or indirect threat to the Soviet control of Poland.

The Soviet formula for maintaining absolute control over the Poles worked well for the first ten years following the end of World War II. The Polish secret police organization grew and matured, always within the strict guidelines of the Soviet Security apparatus. From 1945 to 1955, dissident Polish groups, both civilian and paramilitary were exposed and crushed with ruthless efficiency.

Despite the totalitarianism of communist rule, popular dissatisfaction with Moscow became more widespread. In the mid 1950's, this dissatisfaction spread from the social into the political sphere. The programs instituted by the Kremlin were no longer being condemned only from the anti-Communist underground. Condemnations now arose from within the very ranks of the Polish government itself. The fact of Polish government opposition to the Soviets was not lost on the citizens of Poland. Firmly believing that government sympathies lay on their side, Poles began public protests of increased intensity and frequency.

To quell these protests and restore order, a little known arm of the Polish Secret Police was activated, a paramilitary group called the KBW. Initially, this unit enjoyed tremendous successes in carrying out the wishes of its Soviet masters. The bloody rioting in Poznan in 1956 was only one example of how a small, extraordinary well-trained unit could deploy on short notice and ruthlessly restore order.

In October 1956, the political situation in Poland reached a boiling point. Fueled by inadequate economic policies, the population was enraged. They demanded an end to Soviet domination of Polish economic and political policies. They questioned the very stability of the Polish Communist government. The situation reached such serious levels that direct intervention by the Kremlin was the only realistic way to maintain control. To support Soviet efforts at reaching a diplomatic solution with the Poles, the Red Army in Poland was placed on active war footing. If the "diplomatic solution" failed, there was always the option of crushing any opposition elements with brute force.

The Soviets planned for this contingency very efficiently. The Polish Army, whose loyalty to Moscow was always a subject of considerable doubt, was rendered impotent when Soviet Marshal Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossowski, himself a Pole, issued stand-down orders. The Polish Secret Police were controlled exclusively by the Soviet KGB. There seemed to be nothing in the way of a brutal Soviet crackdown on the dissident Poles.

The final plan did not proceed according to Soviet expectations. When the diplomatic solution failed, the Red Army was activated. Its mission was to march on Warsaw and bring the situation under control. With the might of the Red Army converging on Warsaw, the Soviet leadership felt confident that the Polish problem would be resolved. Their confidence was misplaced. On October 19, 1956, the KBW deployed with every intention of forcibly opposing the Soviet march on Warsaw. The Soviet Armies never reached Warsaw.

What happened during those few days is examined in this study.

CHAPTER I

THE KBW: THE POLISH INTERNAL SECURITY CORPS

The Polish Internal Security Corps (Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego), or the KBW, had its origin in the years following the Second World War. With Eastern Europe being drawn into the Communist satellite orbit, the Soviet Union directed the Government of Poland to organize and field an internal police force. This new organization was called: "The Polish Security Service (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa)," or the UB.¹ Modelled after its Soviet counterpart, the MVD,² the UB was the forerunner of the KBW.³ In order to gain an understanding of why and how the KBW was able to stop Soviet military intervention in Poland in October of 1956, a basic grasp of this unit's evolution, mission, and leaders as well as its relationship to the Soviets is essential.

The origin of the KBW was the result of an evolutionary process which began with the establishment and development of its parent

¹ Among native Poles, the UB was colloquially referred to as the "Bezpieka." Among its agents and operatives, the UB was called: the "Siodemka" (a derivative of the Polish word meaning: "to ride side-saddle") or the "Jedynka" (The One).

² The Soviet Internal Security Police. They are often confused with the MGB (Soviet External Security Police). On 31 March 54, both the MVD and the MGB were incorporated into the KGB.

³ Also written as: "Komitet Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego" (Committee for Internal Security). Initially, there was some discussion as to whether the KBW should be referred to as a "Corps" or a "Committee" with military and political members espousing their respective points of view. Officially, it later became a "Corps" although politicians continued referring to the KBW as a "Committee."

organization, the UB. Upon its formation in 1945, the UB was placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Polish Ministry for Public Security. Initially, the primary mission of the UB was to conduct sensitive background investigations of Polish citizens at the request and direction of the Ministry for Public Security. Over the next few years, as Poland rapidly evolved into a police state, these investigative duties were expanded to include the harassment, arrest, and persecution of individuals and organizations which posed any threat (real or perceived) to the communist regime (i.e., clergy, journalists and university professors). Before long, the UB acquired a reputation of absolute omniscience in its efforts to maintain the status quo as an authoritarian state modelled after the Soviet Union.⁴ From 1945 to 1949, as it grew in size and scope of operations, the UB came to be perceived by the Polish people as nothing more than a contemporary Gestapo organization.

The UB very much resembled the old Nazi Gestapo. In its early years, the UB gained notoriety due to the generally unsavory character of its agents and operatives. For the most part, these individuals were recruited from the worse elements of Polish society and included every variety of informer, stool pigeon, and spy used by the Nazi occupation forces in Poland during the war. Since the end of World War II, the Soviets were in possession of all wartime records meticulously kept by the Germans. As a result, the Soviets had no problem identifying

⁴ Frank Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland - A Study in Communist Decay (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959), p. 50.

these individuals and persuading them, that it would be in their best interests to cooperate and join the newly formed UB. If anyone refused UB employment, it was a small matter for the Soviets to file treason charges for wartime collaboration with the Nazis. If convicted, the charge carried an automatic death penalty. During subsequent trials, the government insured that juries were always made up of people who had suffered terribly as a result of these informers. The verdicts were never in doubt, and justice, such as it was, arrived swiftly.⁵

The KBW was first formed as the uniformed arm of the UB in 1949; its purpose was to protect sensitive UB installations throughout Poland. When the families of several UB agents were threatened with physical harm by outraged Polish citizens, the Public Security Ministry quickly relocated every UB family to a series of small, abandoned fortresses in major Polish cities.⁶ For the most part, these fortresses were relics from the German occupation although some could be traced back to the reigns of Polish kings. They were remodelled and refortified to accommodate their new residents. Massive walls were reconstructed around each compound and entry was strictly controlled through a single, heavily guarded gate. Though these fortresses seemed secure, guard personnel gave an extra measure of protection. Because highly trained, mission

⁵ A fine description of UB recruiting procedures may be found in Bruce E. Henderson and C.C. Cyr, Double Eagle: The Autobiography of a Polish Spy Who Defected to the West (Indianapolis/New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1979), pp. 45-56.

⁶ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland - A Study in Communist Decay, p. 51.

essential UB agents and operatives could not be spared for this task, the Public Security Ministry authorized the formation of a special unit to protect these installations. This new unit was called the KBW, and it was immediately placed under the direct control of the UB's Chain of Command.

Personnel recruitment was one of the first difficulties faced by the newly established KBW. Initially, the Public Security Ministry recommended that hand-picked troops from conventional Polish Army units be transferred to the KBW. Soviet MVD officers, seconded to the UB as "security advisors," disagreed. They argued that such troops could not be used because most of Poland's postwar army consisted of young, ideologically unreliable conscripts who had family members or relatives who had suffered and, sometimes, died at the hands of the very same agents they would now be asked to protect. The Soviets further argued that conscripts could not be expected to remain absolutely loyal to the communist party because nationalistic feelings ran deep in Poland after the war, usually transcending party ideologies. The Soviet view prevailed. KBW recruits would be drawn from outside the Polish military services and would consist of carefully screened, highly motivated young men and women whose loyalty to the party and to the Polish Communist regime was beyond question. The majority of these candidates came from the ranks of the Polish Communist Party and affiliated youth organizations.⁷

⁷ Center for International Studies, The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, Chapter VI, "The Police and the Army" (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1954), p. PoVI-4.

In order to insure that the KBW was manned by competent cadre, Public Security Minister Stanislaw Radkiewicz⁸ directed that a long range training program be established for KBW recruits.⁹ Basically, the program had two goals. First, it would recruit a separate corps of Polish officers and troopers whose area of professional concentration would be highly specialized within the general area of public security. Such a program would entice recruits to consider the KBW as a career commitment rather than as an attractive alternative to mandatory conventional military service.¹⁰ Second, through a concentrated emphasis on general political education (Marxism, Soviet history and advanced Soviet police techniques),¹¹ Poland's communist government would be assured of a reliable KBW Officer Corps loyal to the party. As an added incentive, KBW recruits were paid a minimum of 530 zlotys per month upon successful completion of the rigorous training program.¹² This wage was considered very lucrative for a raw recruit who had completed only the gymnazium (high school). A KBW recruit's counterpart in the conventional Polish Army was paid only about 70 zlotys per month.

⁸ Nicholas Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 107.

⁹ Center for International Studies, The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, p. PoVI-4.

¹⁰ Conscription in the conventional Polish Army or other branches lasted for a period of at least two years. Although the initial commitment for a KBW recruit is not known, it may have been for as long as five years.

¹¹ Center for International Studies, The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, p. PoVI-4.

¹² Ibid.

Of course, the monthly wage was commensurate with a recruit's level of completed education. University graduates selected for KBW training were paid much more - perhaps as high as 900 to 1000 zlotys per month. While in training, both KBW officers and troopers were granted the privilege of using special stores normally reserved for Warsaw Pact officers and their families.¹³ As a result of these attractive wages and special privileges, competition for acceptance into the KBW was very keen.

Initially, most of the instructors in the KBW training program were Soviet police officers.¹⁴ In addition to their training duties, these officers were also organized into teams which, in turn, provided any required "consultations" to various sections of the Public Security Ministry. It is estimated that the total number of Soviet officers involved in the KBW training program may have been as high as 250.¹⁵ In order to make themselves less conspicuous, these Soviet instructors were under orders to wear civilian clothing.¹⁶ In order to build a foundation for the KBW's core personnel, the UB had to look outside its own ranks. So great was the need for experienced instructors in police techniques that the Polish Security Service pressed into service former

¹³ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland - A Study in Communist Decay, p. 51.

¹⁴ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland - A Study in Communist Decay, p. 51.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Center for International Studies, The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, page SuVI-7. More often than not, this technique would tend to backfire on the instructors. Soviet civilian clothing was markedly different from that worn by Polish civilians. As a result, they were immediately recognized.

Nazi intelligence officers to train KBW recruits.¹⁷ Previous records of individuals such as these placed them under the total control of the Soviets. Ex-Nazi officers knew that they could be arrested at any time. Despite avowed national policies and statements to the contrary, such individuals were used to expedite the training until trusted Polish officers had obtained enough knowledge and experience to replace them.

Upon successful completion of the training program, KBW recruits were assigned to the security detachment of a UB installation. Although very little is known about the actual composition of these detachments, they were probably organized into platoon-size elements. Each UB installation was authorized one such platoon of KBW troopers. The actual number of personnel assigned to each platoon varied with the size of the respective UB installation. For example, a UB headquarters compound in a major city was authorized a larger KBW force than a sub-compound in the same city or in a rural area. About 45 troopers per platoon may have been average. It is likely that a KBW platoon was commanded by a junior KBW officer, either a captain or a lieutenant.¹⁸ It is also probable that a few non-commissioned officers were assigned to each KBW platoon. Each KBW detachment was subordinate to the UB at its respective installation.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The probability that individual KBW security detachments were commanded by lieutenants or captains is speculation. There is no doubt that an officer commanded the detachment. Since a platoon is normally commanded by a junior officer, it is logical that similar rank and responsibility would be retained within a uniformed unit such as the KBW.

In 1953, it appeared that the KBW changed the scope of its main activity. A subtle, yet very important change occurred in the KBW's original mission as installation guards. Events precipitating this change centered around a serious and continuing partisan problem which, years after the end of World War II, was still as much a thorn in the side of Warsaw's communist government as it had been to the Germans.¹⁹ After Germany surrendered, a number of Polish partisans, mostly belonging to the Home Army (Armija Krajowa),²⁰ simply refused to accept a Soviet occupation of their homeland. With their old wartime organization still intact, they began a guerrilla war which, they were convinced, would drive the Soviet occupation forces from Poland. Using skills learned during the German occupation, the partisans began derailing Soviet trains bringing goods into Poland from the Soviet Union. As a result, the critical flow of postwar items intended not only for Poland but also for East Germany was threatened. To hunt down and destroy the remaining cells of what was a once formidable underground organization, the Polish government called upon regular Soviet occupation forces.²¹ At the time, its own Polish Army was perceived as too ill

¹⁹ Stanislaw Mikolajczak, The Rape of Poland: A Pattern of Soviet Aggression (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1945), p. 223.

²⁰ The "Armija Krajowa" (AK) was a pro-west, anti communist guerrilla organization controlled from London by the Polish government-in-exile. It was very active against the Nazi occupation forces in Poland during the war. When the Germans were pushed out of Poland by advancing Red Armies, the AK turned its guerrilla activities on the Soviets.

²¹ Center for International Studies, The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, p. PoVI-2.

equipped and poorly trained to deal with the partisans who were very well disciplined and highly organized.²²

In January 1953, a small newly-formed unit consisting of selected KBW troopers from several installations was relieved of its security role and reassigned for "specialized training," in order to deal with the partisan threat. While the extent of the training and the unit's composition is not known, the troopers who took part were probably hand-picked by Witold Sienkiewicz.²³ As chief of Poland's Security Services, Sienkiewicz believed that the partisan problem was an internal Polish affair and should be handled by Poland's own Internal Security forces and not by the Soviets. Initially, the UB's Soviet advisors disagreed. They argued that the KBW, which Sienkiewicz had tasked to deal with the partisan problem, was trained to guard UB installations and not to fight partisans. They emphasized that the KBW lacked the specialized training and the experience in anti-guerrilla tactics to deploy successfully against a force such as the AK. The Soviets felt it would be a serious error to commit the KBW without the proper preparation. On the other hand, the Soviet advisors, sensing some validity in Sienkiewicz's proposal, agreed to a compromise. He was authorized to

²² Basically, the Polish Home Army (AK) kept their World War II underground cells intact after the Germans surrendered in 1945. These cells were activated when anti-Communist Poles perceived Soviet occupation forces as posing the same threat to Poland as the Germans did during the war. They were extremely well supplied from stockpiles of captured German guns and ammunition.

²³ "Witold Sienkiewicz" may have been a shrewdly selected pseudonym. See: Henderson and Cyr, Double Eagle, p. 51.

select individual KBW troopers from any UB installation to form a new unit. The Soviets would accept the responsibility of training this new unit in the necessary anti-guerrilla tactics.

Upon the completion of their "specialized training," the newly formed KBW unit was immediately assigned to a Soviet combat division which had the task of neutralizing the partisan threat. If their performance against the partisans was satisfactory, the entire KBW would be trained in anti-guerrilla tactics.²⁴ If their performance was unsatisfactory, they were to remain in their original role as UB installation guards. Their temporary attachment to the Soviet division would be carefully evaluated by the Poles and by the Soviets. The unit's ability to successfully support Soviet anti-partisan operations was to be assessed in order to determine the KBW's ability to operate independently of the Soviets under similar circumstances in the future.

During the summer of 1953, this newly formed KBW unit was deployed as assault infantry in support of Soviet armor. Although its precise area of deployment is not known, the unit may have initially operated near the Tatry mountains along Poland's border with Czechoslovakia.²⁴

Although their initial role in Soviet-orchestrated anti-partisan operations was a minor one, the KBW's appearance as an anti-guerrilla

²⁴ Although the AK was, historically, very active throughout Poland from 1939 to 1945, it is believed that most of their most lucrative operations took place in or near the Tatry mountain range. These mountains, with their jagged cliffs and dense forests, provided superb terrain from which the AK conducted anti-German (and later anti-Soviet) raids.

unit heralded a major change in their original mission as installation guards. The KBW's involvement with the partisan problem began on July 20, 1953 when the AK dynamited the vital Neisse River Bridge. The following month, a Soviet supply train was derailed near the city of Poznan. In the hope that an increased Soviet presence would curb the incidents of sabotage, a Soviet armored division was assigned to the area where the AK was believed to be operating. Sienkiewicz's hand-picked KBW troopers took part in this operation. Tight security was imposed at all rail depots. Armor patrols, supported by infantry, were deployed along strategic supply lines. One such infantry patrol, possibly a platoon, was composed of KBW troopers.²⁵

On August 1st, a Soviet armored division engaged the partisans. The forest headquarters of the AK was surrounded and every partisan in the area was captured. No prisoners were returned to garrison locations: 78 partisans were immediately executed without trial for armed rebellion against the state. Although it is not known if the KBW took part in the actual executions, their involvement in the operation proved that with the proper training and discipline the KBW was capable of engaging partisan elements to the satisfaction of their own government and more importantly, to the satisfaction of the Soviets. Upon the successful completion of this operation which heralded the end of organized

²⁵ The actual size of the KBW element initially assigned to the Soviets is not known. It may have been as large as a company. However, considering that this KBW unit was a prototype, it is likely that it did not exceed platoon strength.

partisan activity in postwar Poland, all doubts relative to the utilization of the KBW had vanished.²⁶

Shortly after the operation was concluded, the change in the KBW's mission became more obvious. In late September 1953, the number of KBW troopers at every UB installation gradually began to decrease. Their original duties as UB installation guards were turned over to conventional Soviet troops.²⁷ As a direct result of the KBW's role in the anti-partisan operation a joint decision was made in December 1953 by the Polish and Soviet governments to use the KBW exclusively against internal dissident elements.²⁸ Within a few months of this decision, KBW detachments were no longer part of any UB installation's security contingent.

Because of his insistence in utilizing the KBW in a more specialized role, UB Chief Sienkiewicz was, perhaps, the single most important influence in the KBW's evolution from mere installation guards to a

²⁶ Joseph W. Zurawski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology (Detroit: Endurance Press, 1962), p. 100. The partisan AK was outlawed by the Soviets in 1945. It is, however, interesting to note that on August 3, 1956, long after the partisan resistance in Poland was crushed, the AK was given public recognition and a place of honor in the celebration of various Polish holidays. Although the AK was never given the same status as the AL (Armia Ludowa) or "People's Army" (a pro-Moscow partisan element which fought a guerrilla war against the Germans during World War II), their contribution to the German defeat was officially recognized as a result of public pressure.

²⁷ It is likely that the Soviets were used as UB installation guards until the Polish Security Services were, once again, reorganized in 1957. Their role at UB installations became highly visible during the Poznan riots of June 28 thru July 3, 1956.

²⁸ Center for International Studies, The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, p. PoVI-2.

highly trained, well-disciplined paramilitary unit. Sienkiewicz first surfaced on the Polish security scene in 1951 when he replaced General Wacław Komar as commanding officer of the UB.²⁹ Komar fell into Party disfavor and was arrested.³⁰ Sienkiewicz was born in Lithuania and spent much of his adult life as a Communist party secretary in Łódź.³¹ Very little is known about his rise from a relatively minor posting to overall command of the UB. His appointment may have been the result of political influence. However, once firmly entrenched in his position as UB chief, Sienkiewicz proved a harsh and competent taskmaster. He had apparently noticed the tremendous potential posed by the KBW in a role similar to that of its Soviet counterpart, the MVD.³² Under his guidance, the KBW had become the equal of the uniformed security detachments of the Soviet Union by the end of 1953.

While the KBW was still evolving into an elite paramilitary force, an incident occurred in December 1953 which resulted in the reorganization of the KBW's parent unit, the UB. The reorganization was precipitated by the defection of Lieutenant Colonel Józef Światło,³³ a high

²⁹ After the Second World War, Komar's military career very closely followed the career of his friend and mentor, Władysław Gomułka. As a result, when Gomułka was ousted from the Polish political leadership in 1951, Komar was also removed from his sensitive position as Commanding Officer of the UB. See: Henderson and Cyr, Double Eagle, p. 49.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland - A Study in Communist Decay, p. 49.

³² Ibid.

³³ It is highly likely that the name "Światło" is a pseudonym.

ranking UB official who came to the West in December.³⁴ On September 29, 1954 - after nearly a year of debriefing by western intelligence services, Swiatlo began to broadcast his experiences as a UB official into Poland via Radio Free Europe.³⁵ Over 150 programs were devoted to Swiatlo's broadcasts.³⁶

Swiatlo's account of his career as a professional UB officer suddenly brought sensitive information about Poland's security service under international scrutiny. Listening to Radio Free Europe, millions of Poles were able to hear for the first time public confirmations of the UB's secret activities. In his position as Assistant Director of the sensitive Ministry for Public Security's Tenth Department, Swiatlo was responsible for maintaining the ideological purity of every member of the Polish Politburo. He knew about the inner workings of the Polish Communist Party and the Ministry for Public Security, which contained the UB. He could therefore, speak with

³⁴ Richard R. Starr, Poland 1944-1962: The Sovietization of a Captive People (New Orleans: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 54.

³⁵ An excellent account of Swiatlo's revelations, including his personal testimony, may be found in "The Sixth Interim Report of Hearings Before the Select Committee on Communist Aggression, United States House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session (Washington, D.C.: The Government Printing Office, 1954), pages 120 thru 158 and "The Tenth Interim Report of Hearings Before the Select Committee on Communist Aggression, United States House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session (Washington, D.C.: The Government Printing Office, 1954), pp. 41 thru 60 and passim.

³⁶ Konrad Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), p. 21.

authority on many points which previously had been the subject of speculation.³⁷

Swiatlo focused his broadcasts on the persecution and repression brought upon the people of Poland by the UB. He explained how the activities of Poland's security service, including those of the KBW, affected the lives of every Polish citizen.³⁸ Swiatlo emphasized the fact that Polish troops were being used against Polish citizens,³⁹ an apparent reference to the KBW's involvement against partisans during the summer of 1953. His stories of midnight arrests, torture, and secret trials incensed the international community. Outcries of indignation at the methods of the Polish secret police who operated outside the law followed Swiatlo's broadcasts.

Swiatlo's revelations came at a time when the initial stirrings were already taking place in Poland as a result of Stalin's death. With his demise in March 1953, the engine that provided the momentum for secret police terror had slowed. The upheavals that took place in the Soviet Union as a result of exposing Stalin's secret police crimes (i.e., the death of Beria and the release of scores of political prisoners from the Siberian gulags) took place without changing the fundamental structure of Soviet society. The communism of Marx, Lenin and Stalin,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "The Sixth Interim Report of Hearings Before the Select Committee on Communist Aggression," United States House of Representatives, Eighty-Third United States Congress, Second Session (Washington, D.C.: The Government Printing Office, 1954).

³⁹ Ibid.

which had ruled the Soviet system for decades, would not be questioned because of a few "administrative excesses."⁴⁰

In the satellite countries of eastern Europe (especially in Poland), however, the effect of publicizing secret police crimes was much greater. The activities of the Polish security service was seen in the context of a political system which had dominated Poland for only ten short years. As a result of this brief span of communist control in Poland, the crimes of the UB were more intimately known and, therefore, less excusable.⁴¹ Although Swiatlo's exposes came as a shock to some members of the Polish Communist Party, most suspected from the very beginning that excesses were not only being committed, but tolerated, as well. Their suspicions were now confirmed by someone who knew.

Swiatlo's broadcasts triggered public reaction in Poland. Poles simply refused to believe government explanations of Swiatlo's defection. They disbelieved propaganda denouncing Swiatlo as "...an agent provocateur of the US Secret Service."⁴² They demanded the truth and they wanted to hear it from their own leaders, not from the foreigners. Due to public reaction and pressure, the government eased press restrictions. Bowing to popular demands that reforms be instituted within the Ministry for Public Security, the Polish government began to allow

⁴⁰ Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, p. 198.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 198-199.

⁴² Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 23.

criticisms of the UB to be printed in party-sanctioned newspapers.⁴³ That criticisms were even accepted for possible publication implied that the UB's activities were the responsibility of the Polish government⁴⁴ and that it had the power to implement change.

Public awareness of the UB's activities also severely damaged its operational effectiveness in two main areas. First, Swiatlo exposed the UB's activities, leaders, and areas of emphasis. Until Swiatlo's defection, it was not generally known that the UB's internal Polish operations were only a small part of a much larger organization.⁴⁵ It was Swiatlo who revealed that the UB since its inception in 1945 had quietly expanded into a full fledged intelligence organization consisting of twelve directorates. Each directorate was responsible to the Ministry for Public Security. Swiatlo identified the heads of each directorate, explained its function, and named every major intelligence operation at the time of his defection to the West.⁴⁶ This public information compromised virtually every operation the Poles

⁴³ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology, p. 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The best description of the UB's internal organization can be found in Henderson and Cyr, Double Eagle, pp. 64-75 and passim.

⁴⁶ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology, p. 46.

These broadcasts were summarized in "The Swiatlo Story," News From Behind the Iron Curtain, IV (March 1955), pp. 3-36.

Also see: Robert Holt, Radio Free Europe (Minneapolis, 1958), pp. 140-142.

were involved in abroad. Second, the international outcry resulting from Swiatlo's testimony forced the Polish government to suspend temporarily the UB's Gestapo-like modus operandi in Poland.⁴⁷ No longer were people subjected to night arrests or long imprisonment without trial. Persecution of the Roman Catholic Church was eased and the UB no longer compiled extensive dossiers on those who attended religious services. The government began to tolerate catechism instruction for young people.

More importantly, Poland's political opposition could speak with a little more freedom without fearing for their lives. In 1955, although political opponents of the communist regime were in the minority, they enjoyed the support of most anti-communist Poles. Generally, the political opposition was centered near universities in major Polish cities (i.e., Cracow) and consisted of intellectuals, journalists, poets, musicians, and Catholic laymen. Prior to Swiatlo's defection, UB tactics did not stop short of murdering individuals who refused to subordinate their personal beliefs to those of the Polish Communist Party.⁴⁸ Now, even the Polish communists admitted that opinions held by the political opposition would be tolerated because the "lack of constructive criticism was harmful to the best interests of the Party."⁴⁹ With the UB's

⁴⁷ Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, pp. 175-176.

⁴⁸ Mikolajczyk, The Rape of Poland, photography and accompanying text between pp. 178-179.

⁴⁹ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Story in National Psychology, p. 46.

internal police powers seemingly diminished, it appeared that intellectual, social, and political freedom would be allowed.

Swiatlo's broadcasts motivated the Soviets to tighten their control over the Polish Security Service.⁵⁰ The Soviets felt that they had allowed the Warsaw government far too much authority in managing the day-to-day operations of the UB. In the Soviets' mind, Polish laxity had been responsible for Swiatlo's defection. In order to correct this situation, the Soviets directed the Polish government to reorganize its security service. As a major part of this reorganization process, the KBW was removed from the operational jurisdiction of Swienkiewicz's UB and began to function as an autonomous unit for the first time. Of course, the entire reorganization was manipulated by the Soviets from behind the scenes. After this process was completed, not one decision concerning the Polish security service would be made without prior Soviet review or approval.

Because of public revelation concerning the UB's activities and operations, Polish authorities were forced to act swiftly in order to limit the damage. On December 8, 1954, the Polish Parliament⁵¹ met in session and voted to implement a series of changes in the structure of

⁵⁰ Henderson and Cyr, Double Eagle, The Autobiography of a Polish Spy Who Defected to the West, pp. 104-107.

⁵¹ The Polish Parliament is normally referred to as the "Sejm." It is roughly equivalent to the parliamentary system used by most Eastern European countries where the membership in parliament is strictly controlled by the respective national Communist Party. It should not be confused with the democratic, parliamentary system used by Great Britain.

its security service. The vote was approved by Moscow.⁵² The ultimate goal of the Polish authorities was to reorganize the Service while leaving its respective missions untouched. The result was a major undertaking. The Polish Parliament began by abolishing the Ministry for Public Security and demoting its director, Stanislaw Radkiewicz, to the Ministry for State Farms.⁵³ Next, key personnel in the Ministry for Public Security such as Roman Romkowski, Deputy Minister under Radkiewicz, Anatol Fejgin, Director for the UB's Tenth Department and Swiatlo's former superior⁵⁵ and Jacek Rozanski, Chief of the UB's sensitive Personnel Investigations Department⁵⁶ were dismissed from their respective posts and formally expelled from the Polish Communist Party.⁵⁷ Through an accelerated media campaign, the Polish government took great pains to insure that the international community was aware of these changes.

⁵² Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology, p. 46.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Bethell, Gomulka, His Poland, His Communism, p. 175.

⁵⁵ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, pp. 51 and 52.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Gibney uses the Russian spelling (ROZANSKY) in identifying this individual. The difference in spelling is important because it implies that Rozansky may have been a Soviet appointee. During this time in Poland's history, it was not unusual for Soviet citizens to actually change their names when they were used in Poland. See: F. Starr, Poland 1944-1962: The Sovietization of A Captive People, p. 130. If this is true in Rozansky's case, it would mark the first time a Communist satellite nation had removed a Soviet official from its own government position because of public pressure.

⁵⁷ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Story in National Psychology, p. 46.

While the Ministry for Public Security was abolished and most of its senior leadership purged, both the UB and the KBW survived. Re-assigned under separate government administrative organs, their respective missions continued uninterrupted. The entire UB, still under the command of the mercurial Sienkiewicz who survived the purges, was not assigned to the Interior Ministry.⁵⁸ The KBW, on the other hand, became an autonomous unit, assigned to a newly established and reorganized Ministry for Public Security.⁵⁹ Since it was officially separated from its parent organization, the KBW was left without a commanding officer. The Soviets filled this void with Konrad Swietlik, a professional Polish intelligence officer. Since 1946, Swietlik had been in the Soviet Union training with the KGB.⁶⁰ In addition to his expertise on paramilitary operations, Swietlik's ideological reliability was beyond question.

By reassigning the UB and the KBW to different ministries, the Soviets seem to have desired more control over the Polish security service.⁶¹ They blamed the incompetence of the Polish government for the excessive damage done by Swiatlo's broadcasts. The Soviets reasoned that if the government exercised tighter control over the personnel

⁵⁸ Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 24.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Center for International Studies, The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, p. PoVI-5.

⁶¹ Ibid., page PoVI-8.

and activities of the Security Service, the damage caused by a defection could be quickly isolated and corrected without major changes to the entire organization. Since the Polish government was considered incapable of exercising this type of control, the Soviets took over exclusive management of the KBW. The KBW's "new" relationship to the Soviets was illustrated by the change in the KBW's command structure instituted by the Soviets immediately after the reorganization of the Security Service.

After the 1955 reorganization, Swietlik became the first ring in the KBW's new chain of command, reporting to the Commanding General of the Polish Army, Marshal Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossowski.⁶² Rokossowski was the Kremlin's watchdog in Poland long before the KBW was added as an extension of his power. Born in Warsaw in 1896, Rokossowski joined the Bolshevik Army in 1919. Having survived the Stalinist purges of the 1930's, he became a communist party member and Soviet citizen in 1941. By 1944, Rokossowski had risen to the rank of general in command of the Byelorussian Front. In September 1944, with German armies retreating before a Soviet offensive, Rokossowski stopped

⁶² Ibid., page PoVI-6.

In 1949, when Rokossowski (Russian spelling ROKOSOVSKY) replaced Rola-Zymierski, he was not the first Soviet officer to hold a high position in the Polish Army. On June 30, 1944, Jozef Stalin granted Soviet soldiers the "privilege" of accepting Polish citizenship (while officially "renouncing" Soviet citizenship) to lend legality to the massive assignments of Soviet officers and men to the Polish Army. See: Starr, Poland 1944-1962: The Sovietization of a Captive People, p. 130. These Soviet soldiers were called "POP's" (Pleniacy Obowiazki Polaka) translated as: "Those who perform the services of a Pole."

his advance on the outskirts of Warsaw. This action gained him international notoriety for not attempting to prevent the Warsaw ghetto debacle.⁶³ Instead, his Red Army, in excellent tactical position to assist Polish fighters in Warsaw, allowed the Nazis to obliterate resistance in the city at an estimated cost of 200,000 Polish lives.⁶⁴ The Poles never forgave Rokossowski. When he was named Commanding General of the Polish Army in 1949, replacing General Rola-Zymierski, Poles were incensed.⁶⁵

⁶³ The rationale for Rokossowski's actions remains unclear to this day. Rokossowski's biographer, Tadeusz Konecki covers the battle for Warsaw in very general terms, portraying the Soviet Marshal as a hero. See: Tadeusz Konecki, Konstanty Rokossowski (Warszawa: Kolegium Redakcyjne, 1976).

M.K. Dziwanowski, in his: Poland in the Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 134, states that Rokossowski allowed the Nazis to crush the Polish Resistance movement so that the Soviets would not have to contend with it after the war. The tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising has been the subject of bitter controversy with Communist historians taking a radically different view than those who represent a non-Communist point of view.

Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Stefan Korbonski, Fighting Warsaw: The Story of the Polish Underground State 1939 to 1945, translated by F.B. Czarnomski (New York: Minerva Press, 1956), pp. 384-388.

⁶⁵ Center for International Studies The Soviet Takeover of Eastern Europe, p. PoVI-16, PoVI-20 and passim.

Interestingly enough, Khrushchev is quoted in his memoirs: "Everyone knew he (Rokossowski) was a Hero of the Soviet Union. Poles have always been proud of Rokossowski and always will be." See: Strobe Talbot, editor and translator, Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament (Boston: Little and Brown, 1945), p. 199.

Two years later, the Soviets appointed Rokossowski Defense Minister of Poland.⁶⁶ It was the first time since the second world war that the Kremlin named its own man to a position within the Polish government normally reserved for a personal appointment by the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party.

Rokossowski, in turn, had two masters - one military, the other political. In military matters, he reported to Marshal Ivan Konev, the Commander-in-Chief of Warsaw Pact Forces, headquartered in Legnica, Poland. In political matters, which included the KBW, Rokossowski was directly responsible to Ivan Alexandrovich Serov,⁶⁷ Chief of the KGB.⁶⁸ If any conflict arose with Konev concerning matters of State Security in Poland or elsewhere, Serov's decision was final. In spite of his position as Chief of the KGB, relatively little is known about Serov. He may have been involved in the management of satellite Security Services

⁶⁶ Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 11. Rokossowski's selection to the position of Defense Minister may have been a good military appointment, but it was a psychological blunder due to his role in the Warsaw Ghetto debacle. Rokossowski's appointment was the subject of much cynicism in Poland. One example shows Poles reasoning that: "Instead of providing 500,000 Soviet uniforms for 500,000 Polish soldiers, it's cheaper to provide one Polish uniform for one Soviet General."

⁶⁷ Also spelled SEROFF. He was very close to Khrushchev who was undoubtedly responsible for Serov's advancement through the ranks of the KGB. Beginning his career in 1939 with the NKVD (The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), Serov was a tough, brutal looking man. But he was efficient, ruthless and on occasion, charming and gifted with a macabre sense of humor which laced with sarcasm. See: Richard Deacon, A History of the Russian Secret Service (New York: Taplinger Publishers, 1972), p. 425.

⁶⁸ Michael Tatu: Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin translated by Helen Katel (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 198.

as early as 1945.⁶⁹ Although it was Serov's responsibility to insure that the UB and the KBW functioned smoothly, the day-to-day supervision of the KBW may have been delegated to Nikolai Maslenikov, believed to have been the KGB Chief of Station in Warsaw.⁷⁰

In theory, Serov reported to the Soviet Council of Ministers,⁷¹ but, in reality, he answered only to the Soviet Politburo and to the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Khrushchev.⁷² The politburo approved and, in many cases, initiated major KGB operations world-wide.⁷³ Since the Polish government was not part of the KBW's new chain of command, the Soviets were free to manage the activities of the KBW without interference.

Despite the major change in its command structure, the KBW's mission as an elite anti-guerrilla force remained unchanged. This is

⁶⁹ In Poland, Serov conducted his supervision of the UB under the pseudonym: "Malinkov." See: Korvonski, Fighting Warsaw, p. 486.

In Hungary, Serov cemented his reputation as KGB Chief by leading the arrests of Hungarian revolutionists in 1956. This is only one confirmation that Serov controlled the Security Services of not only Poland, but every Eastern European satellite. See: John Barron, KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents (New York: Bantam, 1974) p. 97.

Serov also may have used another pseudonym: General "Lalin." See: Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, p. 43.

⁷⁰ During the October Crisis of 1956, Maslenikov may have been the Soviet Embassy official who kept the Soviet negotiation team telephonically advised of the KBW's posture. See: Khrushchev Remembers, p. 203.

⁷¹ Barron, KGB, The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents, pp. 98-99. This system is believed to have been in use since March 13, 1954.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

substantiated by three key indicators. First, after the KBW's reassignment to the new Ministry for Public Security in 1955, there is no evidence to indicate that the KBW was either phased out or returned to its original role as UB installation guards.⁷⁴ Their performance against the partisan AK in 1953 revealed a highly disciplined, well-trained unit, capable of being successfully deployed against armed opposition. In communist countries, units such as the KBW are not simply disbanded because of international pressure. If anything, training is usually intensified and the entire unit is kept in low profile until public pressure lessens. At that point, the unit resurfaces, sometimes under a different name, to resume its normal duties.

Second, the Soviets showed very little concern about the final outcome of the 1955 reorganization that was implemented by the Polish Parliament. The Soviets seemed to accept the entire process as a necessary evil to appease the international outcries precipitated by Swiatlo's revelations. The Soviets knew that, when the dust finally settled, both the UB and KBW would function in the precise manner dictated by the Soviets, regardless which Ministry had official control. The Soviet position on this point was reflected by one of their own officers: Colonel Nikolai Orechwo, a KGB officer assigned to the Polish

⁷⁴ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, p. 66.

Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Story in Communist Decay, p. 229.

George Blazynski, Flashpoint Poland, Pergamon Studies on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, No. 52 (New York: Maxwell House, 1979), p. xv.

S.L. Shneiderman, The Warsaw Heresy (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), p. 99.

security service as an advisor.⁷⁵ On the occasion of his 50th birthday, Orechwo was presented with a medal by his Polish counterparts. The medal's citation read, in part: "for services to Poland." Orechwo refused the award, blandly stating: "I work for the Soviet Union."⁷⁶

Third, after the 1955 reorganizations, the Soviets placed the KBW under the direct control of Marshal Rokossowski. It is highly improbable that the commander-in-chief of any nation's armed forces would concern himself with the management of mere installation guards. The very fact that Rokossowski personally controlled the KBW indicates that, after the reorganization, the KBW had not only retained its special status as an elite anti-guerrilla force, but also continued to function in this role until 1956.

In 1956, one year after the reorganization of the Polish security service was completed, a major event in the evolution of the KBW took

⁷⁵ Throughout the reorganization, Soviet officers remained in very sensitive positions as "advisors" and "deputies" to Polish officers. See: Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 49.

The purpose these Soviet advisors served was, obviously, not one of "advising," as their titles would seem to indicate. Their only purpose was to insure that the primary mission of the UB and the KBW continued unabated, despite the reorganization. Both sides (Poles and Soviets) retained all the trappings of legitimate relationships, but there was no doubt in anyone's mind which side wielded the real power.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Orechwo commanded the UB's highly sensitive Internal Personnel Department (not to be confused with the Personnel Investigations Department). His assignment was not unusual. Rather, it was in keeping with official Soviet policy to assign Soviet intelligence officers (KGB) to positions which were deemed far too sensitive for supervision by native Polish officers.

place. On June 29, 1956 Marshal Rokossowski deployed the KBW for the express purpose of crushing the Poznan Riots. The activation of the KBW against Polish citizens once again marked a slight change in its original mission. In early 1956, with partisan activity in Poland almost non-existent, the KBW began to alter its area of specialization from guerrilla to riot operations. Turning its anti-partisan operations over to conventional Soviet forces, the KBW was reassigned to another training mission. This time, the KBW was to study and master anti-riot techniques.

While the extent and location of the KBW's training is not known, the training was probably conducted by the Soviets. However, to state that the KBW was being trained in riot control is not really accurate. Riot control was the responsibility of the Police force and the Polish Army. Once conventional control methods failed, the KBW would be committed to a riot for the express purpose of crushing it completely using any measures of force deemed necessary. Combined with almost three years of fighting partisans, the riot training resulted in the emergence of a KBW whose newly acquired expertise was so refined that it would be called upon when all other options were exhausted and only the use of lethal force remained as an alternative to restoring civil order. The first opportunity to deploy the KBW in their new role as riot troops arose during the summer of 1956 when the city of Poznan erupted into a series of bloody protests and mass demonstrations.

The Poznan Riots began on June 28, 1956 during the first day of the International Trade Fair, one of several such fairs being slowly

introduced into the postwar European commercial community.⁷⁷ The basic cause of the riot was economic: acute shortages of homes, low wages, high prices, long work hours, and a critical shortage of a basic staple - bread.⁷⁸ Additionally, the Poznan press published a number of criticisms of the city's administration of the management of factories, and of the poor attitude of party industrial executives. Together, these factors were explosive.⁷⁹

The spark that ignited the Poznan Riots began in Section W3 at ZISPO,⁸⁰ the largest engineering factory in the city employing over 20,000 people.⁸¹ In addition to the general economic situation in Poznan, the average wage at ZISPO had dropped 3.5% since 1954. Personal earnings were further reduced by increased government taxes. Substandard supplies of industrial components and raw materials made it impossible for employees to meet their expected levels of production. By

⁷⁷ The Poznan International Fair was the first of its kind to be held in any satellite nation in the years following World War II. It was intended to be the showplace of 1950's Eastern European (and, therefore, Soviet) industrial technology.

Lyman B. Kirkpatrick III, "The Decision to Intervene: A Comparison of Soviet Interventions from 1953 to 1980." A Paper Presented in Fulfillment of the Overseas Phase of the Department of the Army's Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Program at the United States Army Russian Institute, Garmisch, West Germany, June 1980, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, p. 64.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The London Times, July 2, 1956, p. 8, col 5.

⁸¹ Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 48.

June 23, 1956 the discontent was spreading. ZISPO workers held a meeting at which a thirty-man delegation was elected to present workers' grievances to the Ministry of Machine Industry in Warsaw.⁸²

After their meeting with ministry officials, the ZISPO delegation disappeared. A government spokesman, called upon by ZISPO to account for the missing workers, insisted that the delegation left the ministry after concluding their business and returned to Poznan on June 26th. They were not seen again. When the delegation failed to return to Poznan, fellow workers, incensed by the government's response, searched the city in vain. By the evening of June 27th, Poznan was ablaze with rumors that the ZISPO delegation had been arrested by the UB.⁸³

The next morning at 8 o'clock, factory workers met and began an orderly march on the Poznan city hall. Their purpose was to meet with local communist party officials and demand the release of the thirty delegates.⁸⁴ Initially, the march consisted of about 15,000 ZISPO workers.⁸⁵ After a speech by factory leaders, the marchers crossed

⁸² Ibid., p. 49.

The London Times, July 2, 1956, p. 8, col. 5.

⁸³ The delegation's arrest by the UB was never substantiated.

⁸⁴ The Times (New York), "Poles Riot Against Reds in Poznan; Tanks Used to Quell Them," June 29, 1956, p. 1, col. 8.

⁸⁵ Associated Press Dispatch, The New York Times, July 3, 1956, p. 4, col. 2.

Ulica Towarowa and began walking down Ulica 27-ego Grudnia (Refer to Figure No. 1 on page 32). As the march progressed through the city, more and more people joined the ZISPO workers. Shopkeepers put up their shutters and ran into the street. Bus drivers simply stopped their vehicles in the middle of the road and joined the march.⁸⁶ By the time it reached Plac Wolnosci (literally "Freedom Plaza"),⁸⁷ the crowd, carrying banners demanding "Bread and Freedom,"⁸⁸ swelled to over 30,000 people. Within an hour, the marchers were in front of city hall. Communist party officials presented themselves only to deny that the ZISPO delegation was arrested by the UB. The official reading the prepared statement was constantly interrupted by shouts from the street. The crowd was convinced that their ZISPO delegation was in UB custody.

As their dissatisfaction with government denials grew, the mood of the crowd turned more and more hostile. Banners such as: "Down with the Russians" and "Down with Communism and Soviet Occupation" appeared.⁸⁹ Party officials were accused of treachery and outright murder. City police were deployed to control the workers. Their arrival only further infuriated the crowd. At approximately ten-thirty in the morning on June 28th, the police lost control. Angered workers broke through

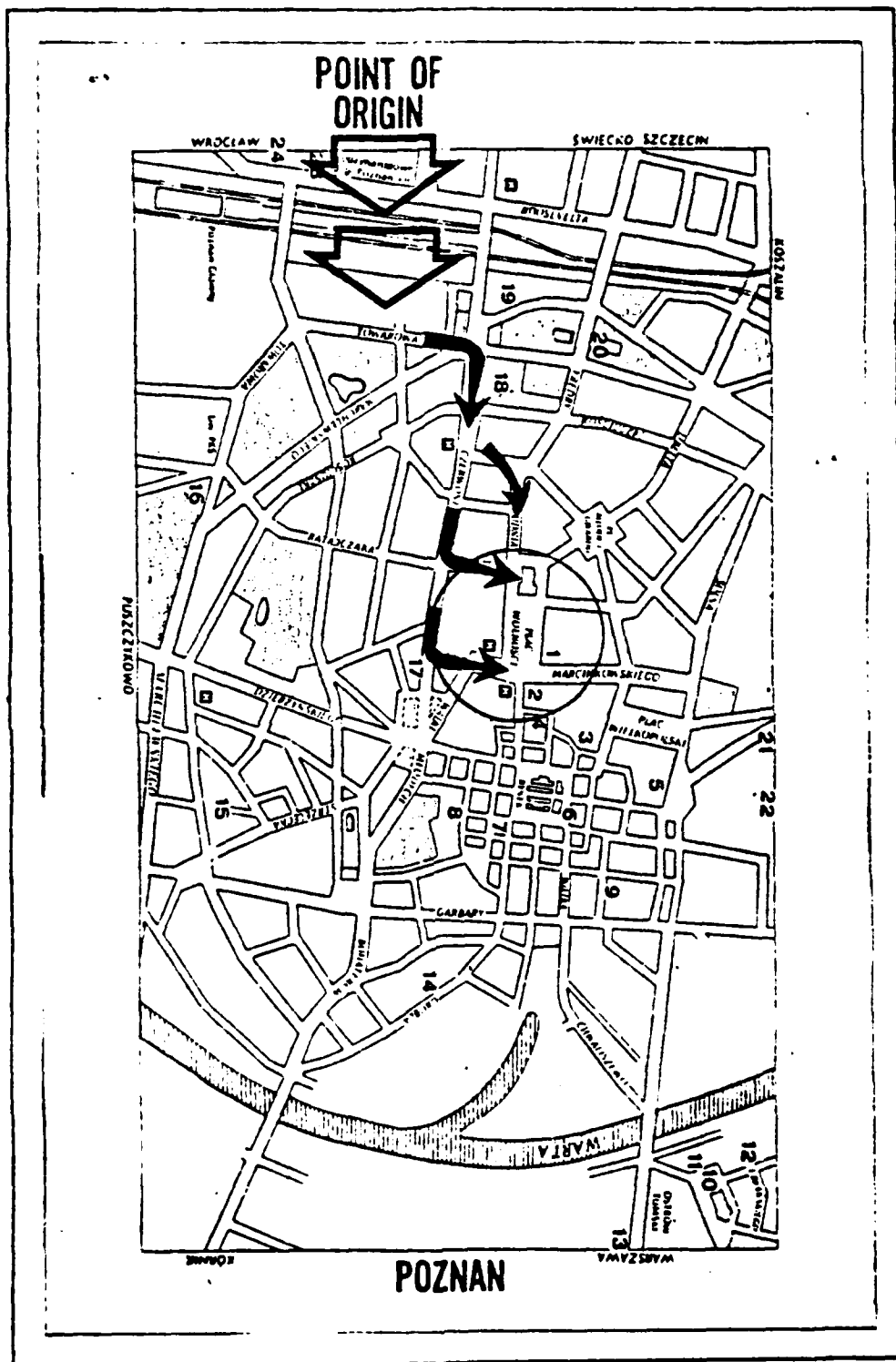
⁸⁶ The Times (London), "Tanks Called Out to Quell Polish Riot; Attack on Poznan Prison and Police Station," June 29, 1956, p. 8, col.1.

⁸⁷ Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 50.

⁸⁸ The Evening Star (Washington), "Polish Revolt Crushed by Government Troops," June 29, 1956, p. 9, col. 3.

⁸⁹ Zurawski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology, pp. 66.

Figure 1
Poznan City Center



Source: Adam Bajcar, Poland, A Guidebook for Tourist, Interpress Publishers (Wydawnictwo Interpress), Warsaw, 1972, p. 52.

flimsy police lines and seized the communist party official reading the statement. By the time reinforcements were able to reach the official, he was beaten senseless.⁹⁰ The crowd had turned into a mob.

As party officials retreated into city hall under a white flag,⁹¹ the mob attacked several government buildings which were also located in the square. They broke into the Poznan jail which was located adjacent to city hall and freed scores of criminals awaiting trial.⁹² These criminals, the "hard core" incorrigibles of Poznan society, included thieves, rapists, arsonists, and murderers.⁹³ Before leaving the jail, the mob opened police arms lockers and took rifles, machine guns, ammunition, and grenades.⁹⁴ The weapons were immediately distributed among the workers rioting outside.

One contributing factor to the escalating violence in and around the Poznan jail was the appearance of a small, but very well-organized

⁹⁰ The Times (London), "Thirty-eight Killed, Two Hundred and Seventy Wounded in Poznan Riot; Troops Join Crowd in Attack on Police," June 30, 1956, p. 6, col. 1.

⁹¹ The Evening Star (Washington), "Polish Revolt Crushed by Communist Troops," June 29, 1956, p. 9, col. 4.

As was true of most major newspapers, The Star had reporters on the scene, originally dispatched to cover the International Trade Fair. Casualty figures reported are estimated. There was (and still is) no definitive means of supporting or denying these figures.

⁹² The Times (London), "Justified Grievances of Poznan," July 2, 1956, p. 8, col. 6.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Seymour Topping, "Pole Dead Put at Close to 1000," The Post and Times Herald (Washington), July 3, 1956, p. 6, col. 3.

anti-communist partisan AK cell. The appearance of the AK was an indication that some partisans had somehow survived the KBW purges of 1953. Taking advantage of the mass confusion in the city, the partisan cell surfaced to continue its fight against Poland's communist regime. While the extent of its operations during the Poznan riots is not known, its initial foray against the government was centered around the heart of the city near the jail.⁹⁵

After ransacking the jail, the armed mob turned their attention to the Poznan radio station, which was located only one block from the Plac Wolnosci.⁹⁶ It was common knowledge that the Poznan radio station was a specially engineered and equipped jamming station used by the government of Poland to prevent broadcasts such as those generated by Radio Free Europe from reaching the people of Poland. The station's personnel, seeing that there was little hope of opposing the crowd, offered no resistance. Instead, they watched helplessly as angry marchers proceeded to obliterate every piece of radio equipment in the station. While the building was being torn apart from the inside other members of the mob set up machine gun nests outside and sandbagged

⁹⁵ The Evening Star (Washington), "Rebels Hold Off Polish Troops," June 30, 1956, p. 1, col. 4.

⁹⁶ The Evening Star (Washington), "Reds Smash Revolt by Polish Workers," June 29, 1956, p. 1, col. 8.

doorways and windows. As a final act of defiance, a preworld war II Polish flag was hoisted above the occupied building.⁹⁷

From the station, the mob rushed toward the headquarters compound of the notorious Poznan UB, which was located on Kochanowski Street - not far from the ill-fated jamming station.⁹⁸ As the crowd approached the UB installation, the disorganization of the marchers was very evident. No one appeared to be acting according to any prearranged plan. There was no attempt either to surround the compound or to approach it from the rear, as would have been logical. Instead, the mob simply locked arms and edged closer and closer to the front gate of the compound.⁹⁹ Apparently, the crowd assumed that the installation guards would not open fire on them. They were wrong.

The UB installation in Poznan was guarded by soldiers of the regular Soviet Army.¹⁰⁰ As the Polish mob approached the front gate, the Soviets hastily deployed machine gun positions and reinforced the

⁹⁷ The basic difference between a prewar and postwar Polish flag was the crown which adorned the head of the Polish eagle. From the time of Przemyslaw II and Wladislaw Lokietek (13th century) until 1945, the crown symbolized Poland's patriotism and her adherence to the Catholic faith. When the Communists occupied Poland in 1945, the White Eagle remained on Poland's flag, but without the crown. See: Maria Borejsze, Polska Magazine, "Emblem With the Eagle," by Colonel Zbigniew Zajac (Ret.), 1978, pp. 42 and 43.

⁹⁸ The Times (London), June 30, 1956, p. 6, col. 1.

⁹⁹ The Times (New York), "Saw Polish Officer Shoot Down Soldier for Refusing to Fire," June 30, 1956, p.1, col. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Associated Press, The New York Times, "Poles Riot Against Reds in Poznan: Tanks Used to Quell Them," June 29, 1956, p. 1, col 8.

already heavily armed soldiers behind the walls of the compound. When the mob reached the front gate, the Soviet commander issued one warning order to halt and disperse. The Poles refused and the Soviets unleashed a hail of rifle and machine gun fire which succeeded in scattering the marchers. Many civilians were killed, among them a woman and her infant child.¹⁰¹ The killings stunned and enraged the mob. Armed demonstrators returned fire while others overturned trucks and automobiles seeking cover. Within a matter of moments, rocks, bottles, and Molotov cocktails were hurled at the Soviets inside the compound. From the captured radio-jamming station nearby, Poles returned fire. A Soviet officer fell, mortally wounded.¹⁰²

As the UB compound entered into a state of siege, rioters scattered throughout Poznan and began overturning vehicles, tearing down Soviet propaganda posters, and setting fire to government buildings. Mobs broke into police stations, overpowered officers on duty, and obtained weapons. At one police station, the mob reportedly lynched an individual believed to be an undercover UB operative.¹⁰³ By the evening of June 28th, the entire city of Poznan seemed gripped by an inexplicable frenzy. The riot had quickly escalated into a full-scale battle. What made this situation particularly dangerous was that the

¹⁰¹ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Story in National Psychology, p. 67.

¹⁰² The Times (New York), "Revolt in Poland Appears Broken," July 1, 1956, p. 4, col. 1.

¹⁰³ Syrop, Spring in October, The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 52.

citizens of Poznan incorrectly believed that what was happening in their own city was only a small part of a nationwide insurrection.

It was soon evident that regular city police were in no position to control the mobs. To restore order, Defense Minister Rokossowski activated the army and ordered it to enter Poznan. The first units appeared in the city at approximately 7 o'clock during the evening of June 28th. Their first priority was to relieve the troops at the UB compound. As Polish tanks, with their supporting infantry, crept toward the compound, they were overpowered by cheering crowds, chanting: "Poles Don't Shoot Poles!" When the commander of one Polish tank, upon being asked if he were a "true Pole," responded in the affirmative, the mob roared its approval.

Instead of suppressing the mob, most Polish soldiers joined it. Those who refused to take part in the siege quickly left the area. And those who could not make up their minds reacted more with embarrassment than with hostility. They were soon persuaded to turn over their rifles and ammunition.¹⁰⁴ Before long, most of the soldiers took up positions and joined the mob in the assault on the UB compound. The crowd was convinced that it had nothing to fear from the soldiers.

As the siege became more intense, many Polish soldiers were killed by the Soviets. Many more were wounded. One wounded soldier, as he was

¹⁰⁴ The Times (New York), "Polish Riot Lasts into Second Day," June 30, 1956, p. 3, col. 1.

taken away in an ambulance, shouted to the mob: "You have nothing to fear from us! We are with you!"¹⁰⁵ With the armed mob now reinforced by regular Polish Army troops, the Soviet Commander of the besieged UB installation felt that it was only a matter of time before he was overwhelmed.

Elsewhere in Poznan, Polish Army units were equally ineffective in controlling the crowds. Polish soldiers openly fraternized with the mob, chatting and laughing amiably as though nothing of consequence was going on. Polish troops allowed civilians to take possession of their military vehicles and drive them around the streets of the city.¹⁰⁶ Other soldiers stood idly by while gangs of looters broke into department stores and food warehouses. By midnight on June 28th, it was evident that the deployment of the Polish Army to deal with the situation was a mistake.

Having failed to deal with the rapidly deteriorating situation in Poznan by less drastic measures, Defense Minister Rokossowski ordered the KBW to crush the riots on June 29th. Apparently, Rokossowski must have thought that the army would prove ineffective because the KBW was activated as a contingency force on June 28th. At the same time Polish Army units moved into Poznan, KBW troopers silently assumed assault

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 3, col 4.

¹⁰⁶ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 230.

positions in the thick forests which surrounded the city. They remained out of sight and awaited further orders.¹⁰⁷ It is likely that at least some Soviet KGB officers were among the KBW force at this time.

At dawn on June 29th, the KBW received orders to enter Poznan and restore order.¹⁰⁸ What followed was the most ruthless crackdown on Polish citizens by fellow countrymen since the terrible days of World War II. The KBW deployed in three stages to deal effectively with the situation in the city. First, Poznań was completely sealed off. No one was allowed to enter or leave the city. Heavily armed KBW troopers patrolled the forests to insure no one slipped through. Steel-helmeted KBW troopers also blocked highways to the west of the city leading into

¹⁰⁷ Sidney Gruson, The Times (New York), June 29, 1956, p. 1, col. 1.

So effective was the deployment of the KBW in the forests around Poznan that it went virtually unnoticed. Apparently, the KBW was very careful not to raise its profile until necessary. That Gruson found out about their deployment is purely coincidental. It was second hand information received from a farmer who lived on the outskirts of Poznan. Unfortunately, Gruson never had the opportunity to verify personally the story since movement outside the city was restricted.

Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology, p. 66.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

Hansjakob Stehle, The Independent Satellite: Society and Politics in Poland Since 1945 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 44n. Stehle suggests that an officer named Kazimierz Witaszewski was in direct control of the KBW during the Poznan Riots. Although this is never clearly stated in any reference, given Witaszewski's dual-hatted role as Rokossowski's Deputy Defense Minister and Commanding Officer of "Special Troops," this conclusion is logical. Stehle supports his suggestion by citing the reason behind Witaszewski's nickname: "Gaspipe." The name was a derogatory reference to an order, issued by Witaszewski, to the KBW during the Poznan Riots authorizing the use of hollow rubber truchcons. Thousands were seriously injured as a result.

East Germany. Vehicles were searched, suspicious goods were confiscated, and citizens were immediately arrested at the slightest provocation.¹⁰⁹ A strict curfew was imposed in every village within a 100 mile radius of Poznan. Anyone violating the curfew would be shot on the spot. The KBW had orders to shoot to kill. There was little doubt that the KBW would follow their instructions.

Second, the KBW moved quickly to break the siege of the UB compound. From prearranged jump-off positions, troopers in armored cars sped through the city to Kochanowski Street, where the UB compound was located. Driving through the crowds at high speed, the KBW ran down anyone who was in their way. Several civilians were killed in this manner. Upon reaching the compound, the KBW initiated a three phase operation: first, they fired huge amounts of tear gas into the crowd, causing disorientation and confusion. Second, the KBW dismounted and, wearing protective masks, quickly and efficiently divided the crowd into four sections. Within each of the four sections, Polish Army personnel were separated from the civilians. The civilians were methodically searched and released if they were unarmed. Polish soldiers were ordered to surrender their weapons. One soldier refused. He was shot and killed. Upon seeing this, the other Polish soldiers threw down their weapons and surrendered. They were immediately placed under arrest. Third, the KBW occupied every building around the UB compound, searching for and arresting suspects. Two hours after they arrived, the KBW broke the siege of the UB compound.

¹⁰⁹ The Evening Star (Washington), "Reds Round Up Poznan Rebels for Big Purge," July 2, 1956, p. 1, col. 4.

Third, while the siege was being broken, other KBW units deployed around Poznan. Special squads combed the roof-tops, searching out and destroying sniper nests. Other troopers were in the process of conducting house-to-house searches arresting wounded rioters who had sought refuge and medical assistance. The KBW also occupied the Poznan rail depot. Operating in small squads, the KBW searched everyone boarding international trains. Additional troopers occupied the National Bank of Poland and quickly dispersed a mob gathering outside. Still another platoon of KBW quietly assembled foreign dignitaries who were caught up in the rioting while visiting the Poznan Trade Fair. These individuals received a prompt but courteous escort out of Poznan "for their own safety."¹¹⁰

At 7 a.m. on June 29th, a special KBW unit recaptured the Poznan radio station.¹¹¹ Although access to the station was blocked by rioters who refused to allow the KBW passage, a path was quickly cleared by firing into the crowd. Several people were killed. The rest scattered.¹¹² The KBW regained control of the station after an hour long, room-to-room battle involving hand-to-hand combat. Casualties ran high on both sides. Eyewitnesses reported several ambulances arriving at the station after

¹¹⁰ The Times (New York), "Polish Riot Lasts Into Second Day: Thirty-eight Dead, Two Hundred and Seventy Hurt," June 30, 1956, p. 1, col. 8.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The Evening Star (Washington), "Polish Revolt Crushed by Communist Troops," June 29th, 1956, p. 9, col. 3.

the shooting stopped.¹¹³ There were also reports that rioters inside the station were executed immediately after they had thrown their weapons down.¹¹⁴

By July 1st, the backbone of the Poznan riots was broken. Polish prisons were filled to capacity with arrested civilians, 90% of whom were under twenty-five years old.¹¹⁵ Some estimates ran as high as 2500 Poles detained pending investigation and eventual trial.¹¹⁶ For the next twenty-four hours, the KBW engaged in operations against rebels still entrenched in various parts of the city. By July 2nd, the KBW neutralized every known pocket of resistance in Poznan.

The Poznan Riots were over on July 3, 1956. Official Polish government statements indicated that "...considerable force was used to bring the riot under control."¹¹⁷ Fifty-three people were killed and over two hundred were wounded between June 28th and July 3rd.¹¹⁸ Some

¹¹³ The Times (New York), "Polish Riot Lasts into Second Day: Thirty-eight Dead, Two Hundred Seventy Hurt," June 30, 1956, p. 3, col. 3.

Nowhere was it reported how many people died in the Radio Station. It was clear, however, that no request for surrender was forwarded by the KBW.

¹¹⁴ Harry Gilroy, "Polish Red Split is Seen in Trials," The Times (New York), July 5, 1956, p. 3, col. 2.

¹¹⁵ The Evening Star (Washington Star), "Reds Round Up Poznan Rebels for Big Purge," July 2, 1956, p. 1, col. 1.

¹¹⁶ Harry Gilroy, "Poland is Called Land of Unrest; New Riots Seen," The Times (New York), July 4, 1956, p. 1, col. 1.

¹¹⁷ Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 52.

¹¹⁸ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology, p. 67.

analysts believe that these officially released figures may be too low, that as many as 1000 people may have died and nearly three times that number may have been wounded.¹¹⁹ Because the KBW was committed relatively early, the rioting was confined to Poznan. No other Polish city experienced any disturbances. After the KBW restored order, fresh Polish Army units were brought into the city to assist police in maintaining control. On the evening of July 3, 1956, the KBW quietly withdrew from Poznan.

The Poznan Riots heralded the emergence of a KBW which was very different from the uniformed security detachments initially formed to protect UB installations. The KBW which operated in the city of Poznan from June 29th to July 3, 1956 was a compact, self-sufficient, and extraordinarily well-trained and well-disciplined "army within an army." Its deployment and execution of orders was methodical and ruthless. When it withdrew from Poznan on July 3rd, the KBW had completed its evolutionary cycle -- emerging as an elite force of special troops -- a unit very similar to the old German Waffen SS Battalions of World War II and to the more contemporary uniformed KGB Divisions of the Soviet Union.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Syrop, Spring in October: The Story of the Polish Revolution 1956, p. 52.

¹²⁰ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 10.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE KBW DURING THE OCTOBER CRISIS OF 1956

With the KBW fully trained and experienced in guerrilla warfare, on October 18, 1956, the unit was mobilized to oppose a massive Soviet military intervention in Poland. The October crisis of 1956 was one of the most important political milestones in eastern Europe after the second world war because it resulted in a major turning point for the Communist Party of Poland. For the first time in the brief history of a satellite nation's communist party, the weight of public pressure brought about a significant change in government.¹ In order to comprehend fully the role of the KBW in the events of that historic October, it is important first to understand the postwar evolution of the political and economic climate in Poland and how that climate precipitated the involvement of the KBW.

The years following World War II were politically bitter ones for the Poles. From 1939 to 1945, Poland had no legitimate government on her own soil. During these years, the Polish government functioned from exile in London.² Led by President Stanislaw Mikolajczk and Prime Minister Wladislaw Sikorski, this government-in-exile was nurtured with promises of repatriation and official international recognition by the Allies when final victory was achieved. After the unconditional surrender of German armies in 1945, however, every promise made

¹ M.K. Dziewanowski, Poland in the Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 183.

² Korbonski, Fighting Warsaw, p. 38.

to the Poles was abandoned in favor of a fragile relationship with the Soviet Union. This abandonment left Poland at the mercy of Soviet occupation forces in eastern Europe.

Realizing that absolute control over postwar Poland had to be consolidated quickly, Joseph Stalin lost little time in establishing a communist puppet regime in Warsaw. This new regime came to power in January 1947 as a direct result of "free" elections which gave the Polish communist party 80% of the vote. The elections were "free" in name only. In reality, they were tightly controlled by the Soviets. Any political opposition was immediately purged through the mechanisms of a secret police state. No political deviation was tolerated. Proletarian rule was ruthlessly enforced while the basic needs of the Polish people were eroded by the rigid centralism of total party control.

The most important priority of the new proletarian regime was to restore national morale through the revitalization of an economy shattered by six years of war. By 1948, the new communist government of Poland found itself incapable of formulating a policy which would stimulate industrial growth and at the same time improve a woefully inadequate standard of living. This impotence in taking decisive action within the economic sphere was the result of Poland's dependence upon the Soviet model.

Soviet domination of the Polish economy began on July 30, 1941. On that day, twenty-seven days after Hitler's armies invaded the Soviet Union, Stalin entered into an alliance with Wladislaw Sikorski, then

the international representative of the embryonic Polish government-in-exile. This alliance, combined with the Stalin-Sikorski Declaration of December 4, 1941, provided the Soviets with a formal and internationally recognized request for military and economic assistance. These two agreements constituted the legal justification which placed Poland in debt to the Soviet Union.³

Soviet influence upon the Polish economy and politics did not end with the second world war. In 1947, under extreme pressure from the Kremlin, the communist government of Poland refused desperately needed assistance from the West. This assistance, mostly economic, was available under the newly-formed Marshall Plan. In its place, the Soviets instituted an assistance program of their own. Poland received \$450 million in credit for the purchase of Soviet capital goods over a five year period. Within two years, the Soviets added another \$100 million in trade agreements. Since loans such as these called for repayment plus only 2% interest, on the surface, the arrangement seemed acceptable. In reality, however, actual repayment proved much more costly.⁴

Coal exports to the Soviet Union from Poland provided an excellent example of how payment for loans was extracted. Between 1947 and 1949, Poland exported over 26 million tons of coal to the Soviet Union. The Polish government was not allowed to set a purchase price for this coal.

³ Mikolajczyk, The Rape of Poland, pp. 259-272.

⁴ An excellent account of how well Poland fared under Stalin may be found in Dziewanowski, Poland in the Twentieth Century, pp. 173-209 and passim.

The price was set by the Soviets. As a result of this economic brow-beating, the Soviets paid the equivalent of only \$8 (US) per ton or considerably less than half of what could have been easily obtained on the world market at the time. Consequently, it came as no surprise when the Polish deficit began to grow at an alarming rate. Of course, this growth was anticipated by the Soviets. When the Polish government found itself so deep in debt that simple interest payments were impossible, the Soviets were quick to announce that new (but predetermined) terms for loan payments had been negotiated. The Poles were informed that repayment was now acceptable only in US dollars or in gold. Since these terms were also beyond the capabilities of the Polish government, the Soviets offered an alternative. Payment would be accepted in Polish industrial goods. The purchase price for these goods would, naturally, be set by the Soviets. Thus, industrial assets which could have been sold at a profit on the world market slowly began to enter the Soviet economy at bargain prices.⁵

These economic manipulations by the Soviet Union did not escape notice of the working-class Pole. The average citizen in Poland was becoming frustrated by severe shortages in basic staples. It soon became evident that the shortages were caused by a lack of capital. It was also obvious that this same capital, if made available, could have been invested in programs which would have improved the standard of living, instead it was siphoned off to repay a debt which was ludicrous

⁵ Starr, Poland 1944-1962, pp. 109-111 and passim. Moscow knew that Poland's weak economy could not support export commitments in addition to her own population. The priority was placed on exports.

by any standard. The blame for all this was placed squarely upon the shoulders of the Polish communist government. In their efforts to respond to the needs of the people and at the same time fulfill Moscow's directives, the Polish government succeeded only in worsening an already deteriorating situation. Public frustration in Poland was growing into outright anger.

As public outcry increased, the Kremlin quietly took notice of these developments. Something had to be done. As a temporary solution, the Soviets decided to allow the Polish political system to restructure within certain, supervised boundaries. As a result of these reorganizations, a procession of revisionist officials paraded forth proposing new economic reforms. These reforms were supposed to be more responsive to the post-war needs of the average Polish citizen.

The most important and the most successful of these revisionists was a man named Wladislaw Gomulka. Gomulka's affiliation with Moscow began before World War II when he was imprisoned by the Pilsudski regime for his communist views. During the war, Gomulka was active in the communist underground. After the war, his leadership abilities enabled him to achieve higher party positions.⁶ One of the most

⁶ Wladislaw Gomulka was initially elected to the position of First Secretary of the Polish United Workers Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnikow) on November 23, 1943. He remained in that position until January 21, 1949 when he was jailed for proposing a radical shift in economic policies. Decollectivization was one of his major proposals. Gomulka was replaced by Boleslaw Bierut who died under mysterious circumstances while visiting Moscow on March 21, 1956. After Bierut's death, Eduard Ochab was selected to fill the void as First Secretary of the Party. He remained in office until voted out by the historic 8th Plenum on October 20, 1956.

successful campaigns launched by Gomulka in the postwar years was his official protest of organized looting in Soviet occupied territories of Poland.⁷ As Gomulka rose steadily through the ranks of the Polish Communist Party, events unfolding in Yugoslavia did not escape his attention. In 1948, when Tito successfully pulled Yugoslavia away from the Soviet orbit and established his own brand of socialism, Gomulka watched with great interest. The Soviet-Yugoslav split had a pronounced and lasting effect on him.⁸ As Gomulka observed Moscow granting Tito concession upon concession, he dreamed that, perhaps, Poland could someday find herself in a similar bargaining position with the Soviet Union. That day would come in October of 1956.

By the mid-1950's, Gomulka had managed to forge an alliance among the revisionist factions within the Polish government. The new alliance was called the Progressives and their primary goal was to secure the maximum amount of freedom for Poland without provoking Moscow. Into this basic philosophy, Gomulka injected his own rejection of universal Soviet doctrine including state control of satellite economies. As an alternative, Gomulka and his progressive government began to orchestrate an economy which was at least partially responsive to the forces of supply and demand. The government provided only general direction. Gomulka's goal was to develop a social system which eliminated man's exploitation by man.⁹ The Soviets were not impressed. Sensing that

⁷ Bernard Newman, Portrait of Poland (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1959), p. 166.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, pp. 91-96.

the political situation in Poland could exceed previously established parameters, Moscow immediately cautioned restraint. But the Poles, having experienced a fresh breeze of liberalism within an otherwise conservative and stale proletarian government system, wanted more.

Soviet Involvement in the October Crisis of 1956

By late summer of 1956, Moscow was convinced that the new progressive philosophy in Poland was beginning to threaten the foundations of communist ideology by emphasizing liberalized interpretations of Marxist dogmas. By mid-October 1956, the Soviet Politburo had concluded that the "proletarian infrastructure" in Poland was being eroded by a "deviationist" search for a more viable "humanist" socialism. This search was interpreted as dangerous and was perceived as a direct threat to Soviet control over Poland. A personal appeal was made to Gomulka. Speaking on behalf of the Politburo, Khrushchev directed Gomulka to cease social experimentation and return to the Marxist fold before it was too late. Gomulka refused. His progressives argued that they should be allowed their prerogative of finding viable solutions to internal Polish problems - problems which the Soviets had failed miserably to solve.

While Gomulka and Khrushchev contemplated their respective positions, serious dissent was festering within the ranks of Poland's government. Although most Poles seemed supportive of Gomulka's philosophy, there were several political factions which disagreed with the liberal position adopted by the progressive government. The most important

and most powerful of these factions were the "Natolinites."¹⁰ Led by a core of six hardline Stalinists, the group received its name because its members met in the old rococco Palace of Natolin near Warsaw.¹¹ The Natolinites believed that Poland's economic woes were a direct result of Gomulka's meddling with the Soviet economic plan for postwar Poland. Arguments that the progressives abandon their reforms and return to the economic course charted for Poland by the Soviet Union were vehemently opposed by Gomulka and his supporters. Despite partisan criticisms, the Natolinites never modified their position. Instead, with Moscow's blessing, they entrenched themselves even deeper within the Polish government as the "loyal opposition" and continued to lobby, albeit ineffectively, against Gomulka and his reforms.

Although the Natolinites were extremely unpopular in Poland, they were looked upon in Moscow as the only political faction that retained its ideological purity. This single factor played a major role in determining the Soviet reaction to Gomulka. In October 1956, the Soviet Politburo decided to use the Natolinites as the catalyst in a coup

¹⁰ Kirkpatrick, "The Decision to Intervene: A Comparison of Soviet Interventions from 1953 to 1980," p. 12.

¹¹ Bethall, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, p. 210. The Natolin Group consisted of the following: Franciszek Mazur, Zenon Nowak, Wiktor Klosiewicz, Franciszek Jozwiak-Witold, Kazimierz Witaszewski and Konstantin Rokossowski.

against the Gomulka government.¹² The coup was planned in four phases culminating in the overthrow of Gomulka and the reestablishment of Soviet-style proletarianism in Poland.

The first phase of the coup required that the Soviets create a "point of contact" within the Natolinite group. As their choice, the Kremlin selected Marshal Konstantin Konstantinovich Rokossowski. Although he was a Pole and not a Russian, Rokossowski was considered to be beyond reproach. As commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces, he was in an excellent position to control the Polish Army in any manner deemed necessary by Moscow.¹³ After Marshal Rokossowski was contacted and informed of the coup, he quickly committed his Natolinites. After a series of whirlwind meetings in and around Warsaw, the Natolinites formulated a course of action that would be implemented on a signal from Rokossowski.

The Natolinite plan called for massive arrests of the entire progressive faction of Gomulka's government. Even Gomulka was in danger.¹⁴ To ensure that this plan was executed smoothly and efficiently,

¹² Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), p. 252. Brzezinski leaves the impression that the initial plan for the coup had originated in the Natolinite camp. This is very unlikely because, in Brzezinski's own words: "The Natolinites counted on the presence of Soviet troops in Poland to inhibit resistance." Given the situation in Poland at the time, orchestration for such massive support had to have come from the Kremlin. The Natolinites would never have planned the coup without this support.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Zurawski, Poland, The Captive Satellite: A Study in National Psychology, p. 89.

Rokossowski coordinated the efforts of his faction with the UB.¹⁵

Neither the Natolinites nor the UB perceived any difficulty with implementing the plan.

The second phase required close coordination between Rokossowski and Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev, Commander-in-Chief of Warsaw Pact forces. This coordination was important because Soviet divisions were to be used in support of the Natolinite coup.¹⁶ Rokossowski was under orders to cancel all leaves and hold all Polish units in garrison areas. These units were to standby as ready reserves for Soviet divisions moving in support of the coup. Communications linking Rokossowski with Konev were given top priority and by October 18, 1956, they were installed, tested, and ready for use.

¹⁵ S.L. Shneiderman, The Warsaw Heresy (New York: Horizon Press, 1959), p. 43. Shneiderman points out that the arrests of the 700 individuals identified by the Natolinites were to be carried out by the "Security Police," or the UB. In fairness, it must be pointed out that not all historians share Shneiderman's view. Newman, for example, believes that the arrests were to be made by the (Polish) Army. See: Bernard Newman, Portrait of Poland (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1959), p. 167. Lewis believes that the Polish Army received the arrest orders and turned them over to the UB. See: Flora Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 219. At the time the Natolinite coup was being planned, the reliability of the Polish Army was very much in question. It is, therefore, unlikely that a force whose reliability has been so questioned be tasked with such a crucial mission.

¹⁶ Several historians/authors describe massive Soviet troop movements in Poland coincidental to the timing of the Natolinite coup.

Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 213.

Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 10.

The third phase involved the mobilization of Soviet military units in and near Poland. The ostensible reason for these mobilizations was "routine maneuvers." Since Soviet Army movements of this magnitude were somewhat common in postwar Poland, there is no evidence to suggest that these activities were initially interpreted as anything other than routine. In reality, however, since World War II, the Soviet military machine in Poland was on active war footing for the first time.¹⁷

During the early morning hours of October 18, 1956, Nikita Khrushchev ordered his mobilized divisions to swing toward the center of Poland and begin their march on Warsaw. These divisions were augmented by sister units stationed in the Soviet Union near the Polish border. When the Soviets reached a predetermined point in their advance, Konev would signal Rokossowski to initiate the Natolinite coup. The goal of the mobilized Soviet divisions was to converge on Warsaw by October 19, 1956. The Soviets reasoned that the coup would have been successfully completed by the time their motorized rifle divisions reached the Polish capital. Phase IV of the entire operation would then logically and very easily fall into place: a new Polish government, controlled by the Marxist Natolinites, would emerge unchallenged.

As the initial stages of the four-phase operation gathered speed, constant communication between Konev and Rokossowski insured that the Natolinites were kept abreast of the Soviet military's progress. Timing

¹⁷ Ibid.

was critical. Khrushchev was so certain of the coup's inevitable success that he felt no threat in leading a high-ranking Soviet delegation to Warsaw on October 19, 1956.¹⁸

Although the Natolinite coup should have succeeded, it did not. Instead, it failed because of one unanticipated factor: The involvement of the KBW.

The Involvement of the KBW in the October Crisis of 1956

On October 18, 1956, Gomulka mobilized the KBW in response to "Soviet maneuvers" within Poland's borders. This mobilization caught the Soviets by complete surprise and with good reason. From July 3, 1956 (the end of the Poznan Riots) to October 18, 1956 (The October Crisis), the activities of the KBW were shrouded in secrecy. There is no evidence to suggest that the KBW was involved in anything other than routine garrison duty following its return from Poznan. However, it is highly improbable that the KBW remained inactive during this period. The Poznan operation may have been reviewed and critiqued. It is also very likely that much time and effort was given to honing the skills already perfected in Poznan.

During the month of August 1956, a series of political events occurred which changed the command structure of the KBW. On August 4, 1956, Wladislaw Gomulka was readmitted to the Polish Communist Party

¹⁸ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 11.

after lengthy "rehabilitation."¹⁹ While forging his new progressive coalition in parliament, Gomulka never doubted that the political course he was charting would encounter serious opposition from Moscow. He knew that, at some point, Soviet intervention was a distinct possibility. Gomulka also knew that he could not rely upon his own armed forces for support because Rokossowski was still very much in command. But this Soviet control over the Polish Armed Forces did not surprise Gomulka; he had expected it. With his options extremely limited, Gomulka was prepared to gamble. For reasons which still remain obscure, Wladislaw Gomulka had decided to enlist the unqualified support of the one group no one, not even the Soviets, would have thought might cooperate: the KBW.

On August 24, 1956, Gomulka appointed his old friend and ally, General Wacław Komar, head of the KBW.²⁰ The association between Gomulka and Komar went back to the early 1950's when both men were arrested for ideological deviation and subsequently purged from the Polish Communist Party. At the time of his arrest Komar was head of Polish Military Intelligence. However, by 1956, he was judged "rehabilitated" and released from prison with his friend, Gomulka. Komar's appointment to command the KBW proved a fortuitous stroke of genius in the difficult days ahead. While Gomulka negotiated with the Soviets, he knew that

¹⁹ Christopher Billingsley, "Poland 1956: The Silent Revolution." Defense Intelligence School Research Paper (PL-4-67), 1956, p. 17.

²⁰ Talbot, Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament, p. 199.

Billingsley, "Poland, 1956: The Silent Revolution," p. 17.

his orders were being carried out by the one man within the Polish government that Gomulka could unhesitatingly trust: Wacław Komar.

When Rokossowski heard of Komar's appointment to head the KBW, he was enraged. But he was powerless to react, because Komar's "rehabilitation," like that of Gomulka, had been officially sanctioned by the Polish Communist Party. In response to Komar's appointment, Rokossowski named Kazimierz Witaszewski (the same "Gaspipe" Witaszewski of Poznań Riots fame) to the rank of Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces.²¹ Rokossowski had hoped that his appointment of Witaszewski would balance the scale against Komar's appointment by Gomulka. Both Witaszewski and Komar enjoyed fearsome reputations within Polish military and police circles. Additionally, Rokossowski made it very clear to his fellow Natolinites that Witaszewski's word would be law if anything should happen to him.

While the Natolinites awaited Rokossowski's signal to initiate the coup against Gomulka, Soviet divisions were on the move. In southwestern Poland, an area heavily forested and sparsely populated,

²¹ Hansjakob Stehlo, The Independent Satellite: Society and Politics in Poland Since 1945 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 44. Kazimierz Witaszewski was Minister of Defense and head of Political Training for the Polish Armed Forces. The title bestowed by Rokossowski only made his position official. In 1956, Witaszewski was Military Attache to Mazur (one of the Natolinite "Inner Circle"), then the Polish Ambassador to Prague. When Colonel Paweł Monat of Polish Intelligence defected to the United States, he passed through Prague. Witaszewski's suspicions are said to have been aroused. He raised a small alarm in Warsaw about Monat, but his warnings were brushed aside. When they were subsequently confirmed, the crafty general used the Monat case as a political lever to insure his position within the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party. His loyalty to Rokossowski was unquestioned.

at least one motorized rifle division crossed the border from East Germany. Its initial destination was Legnica, headquarters of Warsaw Pact forces in Poland.²² At Legnica, a column of Soviet divisions began their march on Warsaw. Near Piotrkow, the Soviet formations pivoted eastward on the main avenue of approach to Lodz and Warsaw.²³

The Soviets entered Poland simultaneously from the northeast and the west. After meeting sister infantry units from western and north-central Poland, the new formation turned toward Bydgoszcz, just northwest of Warsaw proper.²⁴ By the early morning hours of October 19, 1956, company-sized elements from at least seven Soviet divisions were already taking up battle positions near Warsaw.²⁵ The towns of Bielany, Lomianki, and Jablonna were under total control of Soviet combat troops.²⁶ Soviet tanks were seen digging in near the city of Lodz. Within twenty-four hours, the Polish capitol was within range of Soviet artillery batteries. At this time, Rokossowski was advised that the Soviet march on Warsaw

²² Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 11.

²³ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 213.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 10. Although Gibney counts only seven divisions moving within Poland, it is likely that all sister divisions stationed near the border in East Germany, Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union were placed on alert. Available information does not indicate that more than one Soviet division crossed the border during the October Crisis.

²⁶ Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, p. 215.

was on schedule. The Natolinites were given their signal to proceed with the coup.

While the Natolinites were hurrying to their predetermined points within the Polish governmental bureaucracy, Khrushchev had made the decision to fly to Warsaw in what would appear to be a last ditch effort to negotiate with Gomulka. By his own estimate, the Soviet leader reasoned that the coup would have been successfully completed while "negotiations" were still in progress. This positioning would give him the added advantage of having the most important figures within Gomulka's government in one place at one time, thus facilitating their arrest. The Soviets did not seem to be concerned because: (1) as far as the Soviets knew, the Natolinite coup was already in progress, (2) Soviet divisions were almost in position to support the coup and (3) there would be no armed opposition to the Soviet divisions. Any possible threat from the Polish Army had been effectively negated by Rokossowski. In the minds of the Soviet Politburo, the situation in Poland would be under control within twenty-four hours.

At approximately 0130 hours on October 19, 1956, most members of the Soviet Politburo boarded a TU-104 jet transport in Moscow for the five-hour flight to Warsaw. The Soviets were prepared for a lengthy stay. The jet carrying the senior Politburo members was accompanied by at least twenty military aircraft.²⁷ Khrushchev brought personal

²⁷ Henderson and Cyr, Double Eagle, p. 120.

bodyguards, secretaries, political and military aids, cooks, a massive amount of frozen food, and a separate security force of sixty KGB agents.²⁸

This was the first time in the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) that every senior member of the Soviet Politburo was on one aircraft at the same time. It was also the first time that such a flagrant disregard for basic security had been insisted upon by any First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. Such an event has never been repeated and with good reason. It is highly likely that senior officials of the KGB, which is responsible for the personal safety of the Soviet leadership, advised Khrushchev against taking so many high-level Kremlin policymakers with him in the same aircraft. In the event of a crash, the Soviet Union would find itself without critical military and political leaders. Khrushchev ignored their appeals.

For a time, there was much speculation among scholars and historians concerning the identity of Politburo members who accompanied Khrushchev to Poland. In a report filed from Warsaw, a New York Times foreign correspondent states that Khrushchev brought with him Soviet Defense Minister Georgi K. Zhukov, First Deputy Ministers Vyacheslav M. Molotov, Anastas L. Mikoyan, and Lzar M. Kaganovich.²⁹ Historians generally agree

²⁸ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 211.

Christine Hotchkiss, Home to Poland (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1958), p. 37.

²⁹ Sidney Gruson, "Soviet Leaders Rush to Poland to Demand Pro-Moscow Regime: Said to Post Troops at Warsaw," The New York Times, October 20, 1956, p. 1, col. 6.

that Marshal Ivan Konev was part of Khrushchev's delegation.³⁰ The importance of establishing the correct identities is emphasized because the advice imparted by these individuals during the most sensitive portion of the negotiations directly affected the Soviets' final decision.

While Khrushchev's delegation was airborne, the meticulously planned Natolinite coup had encountered its first major problem. Unknown to the faction, a list of 700 progressive politicians loyal to Gomulka and earmarked for arrest by the UB was somehow obtained by General Komar of the KBW.³¹ Precisely how this was done is not clear. It is highly likely that Komar directed selected members of the KBW to infiltrate the Natolinites.³² This was done either on Komar's own initiative or at the direction of his mentor, Gomulka. The list gave Komar his first indication that something was terribly awry within the Polish government. Komar took immediate action. His response to the Natolinite coup was executed in five stages.

³⁰ Lewis states that Marshal Ivan Konev (Supreme Commander of Warsaw Pact Armies) and General Alexi Antonov (Chief of the Soviet Army General Staff) also arrived as part of the delegation. See: Lewis, A Case History of Hope, p. 209. In his account of the incidents surrounding the October Crisis, Gibney states that when Khrushchev deplaned, Marshal Konev "was on hand." In 1969, Lewis' report was partially corroborated by Bethell. See: Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, p. 213. Syrop is also in agreement with the above mentioned historians/authors. See: Syrop, Spring in October, p. 88 and passim.

³¹ Newman, Portrait of Poland, p. 167.

³² Ibid.

First, the KBW was mobilized. At the time of the October Crisis, the KBW consisted of approximately 50,000 seasoned troopers.³³ The majority were stationed in or near Warsaw. Some troopers were garrisoned in locations around the country. Although the exact configuration of these garrison units is not known, they probably consisted of company sized elements under the command of a senior lieutenant or a captain. Leaves were cancelled. Troopers reported to their duty stations where new weapons and ammunition were issued in generous amounts. During this period, Soviet officers were still assigned to the KBW as "advisors." There is no evidence to suggest that they interfered, in any way, with the KBW mobilization. Precisely why they did not interfere is not known. The Soviets assigned to the KBW may have interpreted the sudden activity as taking place in direct support of the Soviet divisions which were on their way to Warsaw. This, of course, was not the case.

Second, Komar immediately dispatched selected units of his KBW to the residences of the 700 progressive politicians who were earmarked for arrest by the UB. They had orders to prevent the arrests. The KBW arrived at the identified residences during the early morning hours. They identified themselves, explained the situation, and ordered the politicians to remain indoors for their own safety. The KBW then stationed themselves by the entrance to each residence and calmly waited

³³ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 10.

for the UB. The UB arrived, on schedule with the coup's time-table, to effect the arrests. What they encountered were well-armed KBW troopers. It is very likely that some confusion followed. It is also very likely that the UB agents quickly concluded that they were no match for the same highly-trained troopers who had crushed the Poznan Riots. No arrests were made that night.³⁴

Third, with a portion of his Warsaw-based KBW contingent protecting Gomulka supporters, Komar's next priority was to deploy the KBW within the city of Warsaw itself.³⁵ If the Soviets wished to enter, there was little which could be done about it. Once Warsaw was occupied, however, Komar was determined to unleash the full fury of his KBW. He hoped that once the conscripted Soviet soldier became acutely aware of precisely who his opponent was, they would be intimidated. Every Soviet soldier knew what had happened in Poznan only four short months before. As a result of their conduct during the riots, the KBW enjoyed a fearsome reputation.

With comparable efficiency the KBW prepared the city's defenses.³⁶ Armored cars filled with KBW troopers began patrolling the streets. They established barricades across roadways, emplaced booby traps, and

³⁴ Newman, Portrait of Poland, p. 167.

Billingsley, Poland, 1956: The Silent Revolution, p. 18.

³⁵ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 13.

³⁶ Shneiderman, The Warsaw Heresy, p. 43.

Hochkiss, Home to Poland, p. 45.

set up carefully concealed machine gun nests. The KBW additionally arranged for caches of food and ammunition. They implemented communications and courier systems. Once again, Warsaw took the appearance of a city under siege. When everything was ready, the KBW quietly took up its assigned positions and waited for the Soviets.

With the ranks of the KBW severely depleted by postings to priority defense positions, Komar faced a critical shortage of trained soldiers. Since Rokossowski was still in command of the Polish Armed Forces, any assistance from the conventional Polish Army had to be discounted. However, this desperately needed assistance was provided by a little known faction within Polish society, the Dombrowski Brigade. This unit was composed of Polish veterans of the Spanish Civil War. Most of its membership, now retired, were highly decorated for bravery in combat. After the war, the unit was deactivated. At the time of the October Crisis, the Dombrowski Brigade was little more than a fraternal organization, given to annual reunions and reminiscences about battles long forgotten. There were many such fraternities in Poland, especially since the second world war. What distinguished the Dombrowski Brigade was the fact that their commander during the bloody days of the Spanish campaigns was a general officer named Wacław Komar.³⁷ Armed with weapons and ammunition provided by the KBW, the Dombrowski Brigade was activated and immediately tasked as a Ready Reserve for Komar's elite KBW.

The fourth stage of Komar's plan was executed simultaneously with the third. While the KBW garrison in Warsaw was preparing the city's

³⁷ Ibid.

defenses, sister KBW units across Poland were deployed to report any unusual activity. At this point, it is important to remember that the mobilization and movement of Soviet divisions was still a remarkably well kept secret. By avoiding heavily populated areas and keeping to the vast, rolling plains of Poland, the Soviets had hoped to avoid detection for as long as possible. Until now, Komar had no idea that the Soviet "maneuvers" were, in reality, a wartime mobilization.

Almost immediately, the KBW units began flooding Komar's headquarters with reports of Soviet movements. Sixty miles from Warsaw, a squad of KBW troopers stopped a Soviet tank column. Jeeps and armored cars were used to block important access roads. Both sides took up defensive positions and awaited further orders.³⁸ At Szczecin a Soviet force attempted to cross the border. They were told to halt by the KBW. The Soviets refused and the KBW opened fire. Although startled, the Soviets did not return the fire. Nor did they continue across the border.³⁹ Further down the Oder River near Slubice, another Soviet tank column attempted to cross a narrow bridge from East Germany. The KBW halted their advance. When the Soviet commander demanded that the KBW step aside, he was politely refused. The KBW calmly informed the Soviet commander that neither he nor his men possessed valid entry visas. Any attempt to force the issue, he was further informed, would constitute a clear violation of international law. The Soviet tanks returned to East Germany.⁴⁰

³⁸ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 217.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 213.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Twenty-five miles west of Warsaw yet another tank column was stopped by the KBW. Opposing elements took up defensive positions. No shots were reported fired.⁴¹

While the KBW scrambled to forestall further Soviet advances, Komar was attempting to contact Gomulka. Coordinating further developments with Gomulka constituted the fifth and final stage of Komar's response to the Natolinite coup. But Komar had no way of knowing that Gomulka had been awakened in the early morning hours. He was informed that a fleet of Soviet aircraft was circling Boernerowo Airport. He was also informed that Khrushchev and the senior members of his Politburo were on one of the aircraft.⁴² Gathering together as many of his supporters as he could, Gomulka raced to the airport. While the Poles were enroute, Gomulka issued orders that the Soviets be kept aloft until he arrived. After Komar had been informed of the situation, he immediately dispatched KBW troopers to the airport. Their orders were to act as Gomulka's personal security force. By the time Gomulka's party reached the airport, the KBW was in position.

When Gomulka arrived at the airport, he immediately issued permission for the Soviet air fleet to land. While he waited for Khrushchev's TU-104

⁴¹ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 13.

⁴² Syrop, Spring in October, p. 158.

Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, p. 213.

to taxi to the receiving ramp, Gomulka observed the flurry of activity that was taking place around him. Security was extremely tight. There were Soviet officers in Russian uniforms, and there were Soviet officers in Polish uniforms. Gomulka also noticed that Rokossowski was on hand to meet the Soviets.⁴³ The lines of Soviet Zims, the Mercedes', and the Chevrolets indicated to Gomulka that the Soviets were expecting to be taken to a specific location.

Since the 8th Plenum was scheduled to convene in Warsaw, Gomulka thought that Khrushchev would insist upon a personal appearance. Gomulka also knew that the presence of Khrushchev at the central committee headquarters would at this time ignite an already volatile situation. Upon seeing Komar's crack KBW troopers standing at the ready, Gomulka felt reassured. He quietly issued orders that the motorcade be directed to the Belvedere Palace instead of the central committee headquarters.⁴⁴ Gomulka's orders were immediately passed to the KBW. Komar was notified that security at the Belvedere Palace would be the responsibility of the KBW.

As Khrushchev walked down the arrival ramp, he wasted no time with formalities. Swiftly approaching the waiting Poles, Khrushchev flew into a rage. He accused the Polish leadership of betrayals. He told

⁴³ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 209. It is not known if Rokossowski knew of the failed coup when he arrived at the airport. It is likely he did not.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

them point blank that they were in the process of sabotaging Soviet efforts at economic stability. But the Polish delegation seemed secure in its position. They responded to each accusation politely and deftly, as if inviting a challenge to their logic. There are reports of that initial meeting which suggest that Khrushchev did not even recognize Gomulka.⁴⁵ He had to be introduced.

The confrontation continued as both delegations entered the vehicles which were waiting for them. Gomulka declined the invitation of Soviet security personnel to ride in separate cars. Instead, he opted to ride with Edward Ochab, one of Poland's most respected politicians.⁴⁶ Khrushchev rode with Jozef Cyrankiewicz, an adroit Kracow lawyer and Polish Minister President.⁴⁷ Khrushchev reportedly continued shouting

⁴⁵ Zurawski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, p. 89. There are several recorded accounts of Khrushchev's arrival in Warsaw. All are similar and none are very flattering toward the Soviet leader. Also see: Newman, A Portrait of Poland, p. 168.

⁴⁶ Edward Ochab was then the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party.

⁴⁷ Born in Tarnow (Poland) in 1910, Jozef Cyrankiewicz became embroiled in the Polish Socialist Movement from his early student days at the Jagiellonian University of Krakow. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, Cyrankiewicz was looked upon, even by the opposing factions in Poland, as a man of decency. After spending the war years in Oswiecim (Auschwitz) and Mathausen concentration camps, he emerged a changed man. Still intelligent and decisive, Cyrankiewicz was readily acceptable to the badly splintered Polish Communist movement. However, through the years, his decisiveness seemed to have worn away. Because of his successive positions in the Party, Cyrankiewicz's advice was often sought. Sometimes he helped. Sometimes, he retreated in haste. He took only the smallest risks possible but is not known to have injured anyone during his various tenures. Lewis described Cyrankiewicz perhaps best of all: "Amicable, courteous, distant, Cyrankiewicz lived of his own choice in a moral and physical slaughterhouse. He applied a band aid to the stricken whenever he felt he could. When he could not, he tried to close his eyes." See: Lewis, A Case History of Hope, p. 181.

violently, using "blunt, foul language."⁴⁸ Cyrankiewicz, the consummate gentleman was "astonished and offended."⁴⁹ Reportedly, when he had had enough of Khrushchev's buffonery, he snapped: "This is not Kercelak."⁵⁰

During the early morning hours of October 19, 1956, the Polish and Soviet delegations conferred at the Belvedere Palace in Lazienki Park.⁵¹ The conference was crucial if Poland was to succeed on the course Gomulka was charting. Before the progressive plan could be continued, the Poles had to win Soviet support on two important points: (1) the domestic considerations envisioned by the Gomulka government were designed to strengthen socialism in Poland, not weaken it; (2) any future economic decisions implemented by the progressive Polish government could only enhance Polish-Soviet relations.⁵² Khrushchev did not believe a word. He told the Poles that Gomulka's "social experimentation"

⁴⁸ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 210.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Kercelak had a notorious reputation as the toughest section of Warsaw. Its inhabitants were widely known as illiterate thugs who lacked even the most rudimentary of social graces. These shortcomings were emphasized by an overabundance of oafish mannerisms and foul language. It is likely that Cyrankiewicz's rapier wit was totally lost on Khrushchev.

⁵¹ The Belvedere Palace was located only a few blocks away from the modern Council of State building where the 8th Plenum's Central Committee was scheduled to convene. The palace itself was remarkably well preserved with Color Rooms (Blue, Red, etc.) and a long French gallery decorated with inlaid tea tables and satin upholstered chairs. The various ante-rooms were excellent for use as sub-conference rooms to the main negotiation chamber. All in all, the Poles correctly assumed that the Soviets would not take offense when they were driven to the Belvedere.

⁵² Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), p. 243.

would shatter institutional and ideological party uniformity. The Poles listened to a ninety-minute harangue about the economic benefits they had always received from the Soviet Union.⁵³

Khrushchev never had the opportunity to conclude his speech. He was suddenly interrupted by a Polish messenger who handed Gomulka a hastily scrawled note⁵⁴ from Komar.⁵⁵ In it, Komar informed Gomulka of four points: (1) the Natolinite attempt at a coup, (2) the coup's failure, (3) the massive Soviet mobilizations and subsequent march on Warsaw and (4) KBW control of the main radio station in the city of Warsaw.⁵⁶ Gomulka passed the message to his comrades. After reading it, the Poles stared at each other incredulously. Gomulka then arose and revealed the contents of the message to Khrushchev. He demanded to know if the message was true.⁵⁷ The Soviet leader feigned amazement and retreated into

⁵³ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 212.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Lewis' position is supported by Shneiderman. See: Shneiderman, The Warsaw Heresy, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Statement by Maria Wisniewska, a resident of Warsaw during the October Crisis of 1956, personal interview, Springfield, Massachusetts, April 22, 1981. Wisniewska admits that the message's origin (Komar) is speculation. No one really knows. Wisniewska's information is based upon hearsay. However, given the course of developments thus far, it is logical to assume that either Komar or his KBW sent the note that was handed to Gomulka at the Belvedere Palace.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 216.

Kirkpatrick, The Decision to Intervene: A Comparison of Soviet Interventions from 1953 to 1980, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 212.

conference with two senior Soviet military aides, Konev and Antonov.⁵⁸ While Khrushchev was in conference, Gomulka continued to receive updated reports of Soviet military activity. When Khrushchev finally emerged, he informed the Poles that Warsaw had indeed been surrounded by Soviet armies.⁵⁹

Gomulka's response was measured and carefully calculated. As military and political aides from both delegations filtered into the room, Gomulka summarized the situation to Khrushchev. In a cold voice, Gomulka informed the Soviet leader that, unless his troops were called off immediately, negotiations would cease.⁶⁰ He also told Khrushchev that his Natolinite putsch had failed.⁶¹ If the Soviets continued to act unreasonably, Gomulka threatened to use Warsaw radio and bring the entire situation to the Polish people.⁶² The final decision would then be theirs. Warsaw Radio, now controlled by the KBW, was alerted to prepare for an important broadcast.⁶³ The next move was up to the Soviets.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Shneiderman, The Warsaw Heresy, p. 45.

⁶¹ Kirkpatrick, "The Decision to Intervene: A Comparison of Soviet Interventions from 1953 to 1980," p. 13.

⁶² Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 212.

⁶³ V.L. Benes and N.G. Pounds, Poland (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 304.

As the Poles watched, Marshals Konev and Rokossowski were ushered in to explain Khrushchev's position.⁶⁴ When the Soviet leader announced that Soviet armies had surrounded Warsaw, he knew he had gone too far. The Poles were no longer angry; they were incensed. In his effort to diffuse Khrushchev's remarks, Konev seemed almost comical in his explanation: "These are just routine maneuvers."⁶⁵ Konev's statement was followed by silence. No one moved or spoke. The Poles knew he was lying. Nothing that the KBW was reporting sounded "routine." It was Cyrankiewicz, the urbane Krakow lawyer, who broke the silence. As he moved toward the group of Soviet officers, the Minister President knew that he commanded everyone's attention. Ignoring Khrushchev and Konev, Cyrankiewicz approached Rokossowski. As he stood face to face with the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, he quietly demanded an answer to only one question. He asked Rokossowski: "Are you a Pole or are you a Russian?"⁶⁶

The ultimate question had been posed to Rokossowski. The lawyer Cyrankiewicz had set a trap of stark simplicity. It was crafted with such skill that any answer insured immediate and irrevocable condemnation from either side. Rokossowski was caught in the middle. To admit

⁶⁴ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 212.

⁶⁵ Talbot, Khrushchev Remembers, p. 203.

Adam B. Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1973. Second Edition (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 592.

⁶⁶ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 212.

he was Russian would only lend credence to Polish accusations that he was a traitor. To admit he was Polish would have enraged the Soviets. After all, Rokossowski was a Soviet Marshal. Rokossowski looked directly at Cyrankiewicz and said that he "was loyal to the Polish government."⁶⁷ It was not what the Soviets were expecting to hear.⁶⁸ Before Khrushchev could react, Cyrankiewicz rallied his fellow Poles to capitalize on his initiative.

The problem of Soviet troops surrounding Warsaw had to be addressed. According to the most recent KBW reports, no orders had been issued to halt the Soviet advance.⁶⁹ Although KBW squads had performed brilliantly in stopping Soviet tank columns in several locations, tank columns were much smaller than regular army divisions. Since these divisions

⁶⁷ Ibid. Through the complex events surrounding the October Crisis of 1956, Rokossowski emerges as a tragic figure. Since he was educated in Moscow, the Poles looked upon him as the very symbol of Soviet domination in Poland. On the other hand, the Soviets were reluctant to accept him as one of their own because they always suspected that, under Rokossowski's Soviet exterior, he harbored a secret respect for the Poles. See: Zurawski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, p. 90ff.

⁶⁸ The members of the Soviet delegation in general, and Khrushchev in particular, were rightly surprised when Rokossowski stated that he would follow the orders of the Polish government. At that particular moment, the battle lines were already drawn. The Polish government stood in direct opposition to Kremlin policy. For a Soviet Marshal to support an opposition element was, indeed, very unusual. Technically, it amounted to treason. It is unlikely that the Poles showed any appreciation for Rokossowski's statement. There is no evidence to suggest that Rokossowski was, in any way, punished for taking this stand. Quite the opposite. After Rokossowski lost his seat in the Polish Politburo (at the 8th Plenum), there are indications that he returned to the Soviet Union, held a series of important positions and "went on to honorable retirement." See: Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence, p. 592.

⁶⁹ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 217.

were already at the gates of Warsaw, it was only a matter of time before one Soviet commander decided to breach the city's defenses. Gomulka was certain that whatever followed that initial breach would be difficult, if not impossible, to stop. Once more, in the interest of avoiding unnecessary bloodshed, Gomulka asked Khrushchev to withdraw his divisions. The Soviet leader raged that he would solve the Polish problem by force.⁷⁰

At this point, the exhausted Polish leader outlined his only alternative. Gomulka informed Khrushchev that the situation in Poland was "volatile." Gomulka warned that civil war could result if the situation were handled "stupidly."⁷¹ He also told the Soviet leader that using force was unnecessary and counterproductive. Khrushchev was then informed, once again, that the matter of the Soviet divisions surrounding Warsaw would be taken directly to the Polish people.⁷² But Gomulka was careful not to leave Khrushchev without any options. To support his

⁷⁰ Talbot, Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament, p. 200. Khrushchev's real fear lay in the fact that, if Poland were allowed to leave the satellite orbit, the Soviet Union would be in imminent danger of being cut off from her divisions in East Germany. Since World War II, Poland has been utilized as a valuable conduit to move men and material in support of Soviet armies near the "Iron Curtain." Compounding this very real possibility was the nagging embarrassment of how Tito had masterfully guided Yugoslavia away from political control by Moscow. Khrushchev stood determined not to allow another satellite country to wander away from the Soviet Bloc in search of its own interpretation of Marxist ideology. To insure that this would not happen, the Soviet leader was ready to use force, if necessary.

⁷¹ Newman, Portrait of Poland, p. 168.

⁷² Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, p. 90. As before, Gomulka's threat would have been implemented through the services of Warsaw Radio which was under KBW control.

position, Gomulka pointed out the following: first, he emphasized that Poland could never leave the Soviet Bloc.⁷³ He admitted that his country was too closely tied to the Soviet Union. Gomulka did, however, demand a "Polish Poland,"⁷⁴ a country able to influence and control its own affairs without unwelcome, outside interference.

Second, since the possibility of unwelcome, outside interference had become a reality, Gomulka stated that something had to be done. He told Khrushchev that the KBW controlled the city of Warsaw as well as all the main avenues of approach into the city.⁷⁵ They were under orders to prevent Soviet troops from entering the Polish capital. Even as he spoke, Gomulka continued to receive KBW reports on new Soviet positions. These reports were gathered into a pile and unceremoniously thrown in front of Khrushchev.

Third, Gomulka declared that the Polish Army would never fight against its own people.⁷⁶ If anything, he stated, the soldiers would take the side of Polish citizens. Poznan was proof of that. Rokossowski was immediately challenged to deny Gomulka's accusation.⁷⁷ He could not. Rokossowski had to admit to his Soviet superiors that his

⁷³ Brzezinski, The Soviet Bloc, p. 254.

⁷⁴ Newman, Portrait of Poland, p. 168.

⁷⁵ V.L. Benes and N.G. Pounds, Poland (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 304.

⁷⁶ Newman, Portrait of Poland, p. 169.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Polish forces could not be relied upon either to fight or to provide a competent reserve for Soviet combat units.⁷⁸ Khrushchev was staggered at the admission. If the Soviets had any reservations about the effectiveness of the Polish Armed Forces, these reservations had previously never been made public.

Khrushchev was caught off guard by Rokossowski's statement. He immediately withdrew from the room and began a heated conference with his top military aides.⁷⁹ The Soviet leader was enraged by the suggestion that 350,000 troops of the Polish Armed Forces were suddenly rendered impotent.⁸⁰ Reviewing their own reports, the Soviets were apparently shocked when their information confirmed what the Poles were saying all along. From the time of the Soviet mobilizations, no problems had been reported in any of the Polish Army garrisons around Poland. This was, thought the Soviets, as it should be. But the calmness was deceptive. Polish soldiers were very curious as to what was going on. Many Polish officers shared this curiosity. Intelligence reports passed to Khrushchev indicated that "a growing number of officers were seen in the company of local, pro-Gomulka committeemen."⁸¹ Even the Soviets realized

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Talbot, Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament, p. 203.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Konrad Syrop, Poland: Between the Hammer and the Anvil (London: Robert Hale, Limited, 1968), p. 159. The actual figures reflecting the manpower strength of the Polish Army in October 1956 are very nebulous. Figures fluctuate between 300,000 and 500,000. 350,000 was selected as a median indicator.

⁸¹ Frank Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1959), pp. 10-11.

that if fighting erupted, these officers and their men would not support the foreigners.

Perhaps the most damaging of these reports originated with the Soviet ambassador to Warsaw, Ponteleimon Ponomarenko.⁸² When Khrushchev and his party landed at Boernerowo Airport, most of Warsaw's highly placed Soviet officials were on hand to welcome him. Ponomarenko was the only exception. He elected to remain at his posting.⁸³ As a result of his decision, Ponomarenko was able to provide Khrushchev with the most detailed portrait of a city preparing for siege. His information confirmed that "the calm to be seen in Warsaw is deceptive."⁸⁴ He reported that worker committees were well-organized, armed and prepared to support Gomulka instead of the Natolinites. Additionally, Ponomarenko dispatched young consular officers on walks throughout the city. These young officers returned with reports of Komar's KBW patrols everywhere. The Soviet Ambassador correctly warned his leadership that

⁸² Ibid., p. 13.

⁸³ Bethell gives the impression that Ponomarenko was at the airport when Khrushchev and his delegation arrived. See: Nicholas Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 214. This is the only account that places Ponomarenko with Khrushchev at any time during the October Crisis. Bethell may be right. However, given the volatile situation in Warsaw on that day, it is likely that Ponomarenko remained in the Soviet Embassy for the purpose of maintaining a position from which he could pass important information to the Soviet delegation on the activities of the KBW. Because the Soviet Embassy was just across the street from the Belvedere Palace, communication between Ponomarenko and the Soviet delegation was not difficult.

⁸⁴ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 13.

these "patrols" were only "token detachments."⁸⁵ The real strength of the KBW was deployed around various approaches to the city.

More reports sent into Khrushchev's command post revealed a Polish military increasingly committed to supporting Gomulka's government. At least one flight of a Warsaw-based Polish Air Force unit was on routine patrol when the pilot spotted a platoon of Soviet tanks crossing a field. The pilot requested permission to bomb them. Permission was, of course, refused.⁸⁶ At the Polish Air Base near Deblin, armed Polish airmen stood guard. They were posted around certain hangers and had orders to shoot if the Soviets attempted to gain entry.⁸⁷

Still other reports confirmed escalating problems among the civilian population. In Warsaw, rioting students swarmed over a statue of Felix Dzierzynski; it was a gift from the Soviet Union. Dzierzynski had been a Polish nobleman and close friend of Lenin, as well as the founder of the "Cheka," the first Soviet security police. Nicknamed "The Hangman," Felix Dzierzynski had a notorious reputation. When the KBW finally arrived to chase the students away, they found the statue's hands dripping with blood - red paint.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, p. 215.

Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 14.

⁸⁷ Hotchkiss, Home to Poland, p. 46.

⁸⁸ Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay, p. 8.

With the crisis in Poland coming to a head, Khrushchev made his decision. He could not ignore the scores of reports which lay in front of him. All but a few confirmed Polish allegations. He did have the option of ordering his divisions to break through the thin KBW lines and possibly crush the KBW in the process. It was unlikely that the KBW would have dissipated quickly. In all probability, the KBW would have fought on long enough to allow the national Polish armies to regroup and mobilize. Once that happened, more Soviet divisions would have to have been activated to insure victory. War would have been inevitable. Khrushchev turned to his top military aides and gave the order to stop the Soviet advance on Warsaw.⁸⁹

Before Gomulka could react, Komar gave orders for the KBW to confirm that Khrushchev's wishes were being carried out by Soviet military units in the field. Komar arrived at the Belvedere only when he was satisfied that the KBW had complete control of Warsaw. At the Belvedere, Komar was in a better position to provide Gomulka with guidance on the rapidly developing situation.⁹⁰ His quick thinking gave the Polish leader valuable time to consider two possibilities: (1) Khrushchev was lying. If the order halting the Soviet advance was a ploy, the KBW would react quickly and decisively. (2) Khrushchev's order was legitimate. If this was the case, Komar's order bought the Poles precious time to formulate a fresh position in response to Khrushchev's decision.

⁸⁹ Talbot, Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Will and Testament, p. 204.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 203. Talbot confirms that Komar was by Gomulka's side.

Once again, field reports began flooding the Polish command post at the Belvedere Palace. Preliminary reports indicated that the Soviets advance was, indeed, grinding to a halt. Because of the limited number of KBW troopers, the Poles could either verify that the Soviets had halted or defend Warsaw. The reports that did come in were very careful to specify that the Soviets were not withdrawing; they had simply stopped where they were. Apparently, the Soviet commanders were awaiting further orders.⁹¹

At this point, Gomulka and Komar received some unexpected assistance. When workers at the Zeran Automobile Plant heard that the KBW was deployed too thinly to verify the Soviet halt, they offered to help. Precisely how or where they received their information is not known. Gathering in groups led by respective foremen, the Zeran workers "piled into automobiles just off the assembly line."⁹² After the cars left the Zeran holding yards, every available roadway, dirt or paved, was utilized. The Soviet tanks were spotted just a short distance from the outskirts of Warsaw. The Zeran workers took careful count of the tanks and noted their positions. After shouting obscenities

⁹¹ Ulam, Stalin: The Man and His Era, p. 592. Ulam is correct in stating that the Soviet advance was halted. However, he is in error when he indicates that Rokossowski had ordered it. The majority of available evidence indicates that Khrushchev gave the order, not Rokossowski. Rokossowski, as the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, had nothing to do with Soviet troops in Poland. Soviet troops were the responsibility of Marshal Konev. See: Frank Gibney, The Frozen Revolution: Poland, A Study in Communist Decay (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1959), p. 12.

⁹² Lewis, A Case History of Hope, p. 219.

at the Soviet troops, the Zeran workers returned to Warsaw.⁹³ They reported what they had seen to the KBW. The KBW, in turn, passed the information on to the Belvedere Palace. Within thirty minutes, Komar handed Gomulka reports which confirmed that Khrushchev's tanks had, indeed, stopped on the outskirts of Warsaw.⁹⁴

With the advance of Soviet armies halted, Gomulka and Khrushchev turned to the next most pressing question: "What was to be the makeup of the new Polish Politburo that Gomulka would lead?"⁹⁵ The Soviets knew that the 8th Plenum was preparing for session.⁹⁶ This Plenum would decide the constitution of the Polish Politburo. The selection of Polish Politburo members was crucial because it would set the tone of Polish - Soviet relations for the coming decade. The Soviets fought hard to insure that a pro-Soviet majority was selected. Because of the behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing that was going on, a shroud of secrecy was thrown over all proceedings by the Polish government. If the Polish

⁹³ Statement by Maria Wisniewska, a resident of Warsaw during the October Crisis of 1956, personal interview, Springfield, Massachusetts, April 22, 1982.

⁹⁴ Ibid. Although Wisniewska indicated that the time lapse was thirty minutes, given the amount of confusion surrounding the negotiations, the time element was likely much greater. Here it should be mentioned that Wisniewska's recollections are based upon second-hand information. Although she was in the city at the time, she did not actually participate with the workers.

⁹⁵ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 216.

⁹⁶ The 8th Plenum was meeting to confirm a new Polish Politburo under the leadership of Wladislaw Gomulka as the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party. Gomulka's selection to the position of First Secretary had been reluctantly approved by Khrushchev. See: Talbot, Khrushchev Remembers, p. 204.

public knew that the Kremlin was attempting to force their position in time for the general election, the ensuing outrage would be difficult to control.

The Soviet position was very clear. Khrushchev would not tolerate a compromise. Gomulka and his progressives would be allowed Polish Politburo membership provided Marshal Rokossowski remained as the Kremlin-appointed member of that body. Rokossowski's presence would insure that Moscow received all information on the workings of the Polish government. In effect, Rokossowski would continue in his role as Moscow's watchdog in Poland. The Polish delegation howled with indignation at the very suggestion.⁹⁷ Gomulka alone remained calm. Turning to one of his most trusted aides, the Polish leader quietly issued an order. A word was whispered in Komar's ear, and the aide quickly left to carry out Gomulka's order to release the names of Polish Politburo nominees to the general public.

Gomulka then faced Khrushchev and emphasized three points: (1) The ouster of Rokossowski was not even a matter of discussion. As far as the Poles were concerned, Rokossowski was a traitor and a symbol of the foreign domination that Poland was attempting to shed. He had to be removed. (2) As far as "allowing" progressive representation in the Polish Politburo, Gomulka informed Khrushchev that the Soviets were in a position to "allow" nothing. (3) The Polish leader calmly revealed

⁹⁷ The Poles would never accept Rokossowski as part of the new Polish Politburo. See: Bernard Newman, Portrait of Poland (London: Robert Hale, Limited, 1959), p. 172.

to the Soviets that he had just issued an order releasing the list of Politburo nominees to the Polish public.⁹⁸ The list would be reviewed and publicized by the 8th Plenum. But Gomulka wanted to insure that the Soviet influence with the 8th Plenum would be kept to a minimum. After his aide was ordered to release the list of nominees, Komar was ordered to activate the Dombrowski Brigade. Previously, the Dombrowski Brigade had been seconded to Komar's elite KBW as a Ready Reserve; it would now be deployed with orders to guard the building where the 8th Plenum was scheduled to convene.⁹⁹

Khrushchev and his Soviet delegation had been outmaneuvered by the independent Poles. Within the Belvedere Palace, the Polish contingent had managed to present and defend their position with remarkable success. Outside the confines of the Belvedere, Komar's KBW had provided the Polish negotiators with a military option. If effected, this option would make the existing situation most unpleasant for the Soviets.

What followed Gomulka's speech to Khrushchev is not clear. It appears that Khrushchev was called from the conference table to take a personal telephone call from Red Chinese Premier Chou En Lai. During this telephone conversation, it is likely that Chou En Lai informed Khrushchev that Wladislaw Gomulka enjoyed the support of the Chinese Communist Party.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 217. Besides revealing that the list of Politburo nominees had been made public, Edward Ochab informed Khrushchev that the list could not be retracted.

⁹⁹ Shneiderman, The Warsaw Heresy, p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Bethell, Gomulka, His Poland, His Communism, p. 216.

In order to understand how Chinese support for Gomulka's progressives originated, it is necessary to consider Edward Ochab's visit to China in early fall of 1956. In his role as First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party, Ochab attended the Congress of the Chinese Communist party in Peiking. At the time, it was public knowledge that Mao had had his differences with Stalin's ideology. Things had not changed much when Khrushchev came to power. In response to the Soviet hard-line, Mao had developed a communist philosophy called "the doctrine of a hundred flowers." In essence, this doctrine encouraged Chinese communist party members to think for themselves, even if this thinking was different from fellow communist party members.¹⁰¹

At some point during the Congress, Mao and Ochab met personally. Mao closely questioned Ochab about the Poznan Riots and about a man named Gomulka. After Ochab's explanations, Mao reportedly replied: "We have our own Gomulka in China, but he has never been expelled from the Party. The Party keeps him in the Central Committee and, while they do not always agree with him, they often ask his opinion."¹⁰² Encouraged by Mao's attitude, Ochab openly discussed Poland's political and economic troubles with the Soviet Union. When Ochab finished, Mao said: "It seems that China and Poland have been keeping company for some time already without even knowing it. It is good company and we

¹⁰¹ Lewis, A Case History of Hope: The Story of Poland's Peaceful Revolution, p. 182.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 182.

are glad of it."¹⁰³ When he heard of Mao's conference with Ochab, Anastas Mikoyan, the Soviet representative to the Chinese Congress, was outraged.¹⁰⁴

The Poles used Mao's comments to sanction their own position within the sphere of accepted communist ideology. When Gomulka's progressives heard that Khrushchev was personally enroute to Warsaw, a message was quickly dispatched to Kiriluk, the Polish ambassador to China. While negotiations between Gomulka and Khrushchev were taking place at the Belvedere Palace, Kiriluk reportedly spent the night "closeted with Chinese leaders." He eventually persuaded Chou En Lai to intervene personally on Poland's behalf.¹⁰⁵

When Khrushchev returned to the negotiation chamber after his telephone conversation with Chou En Lai, there was a marked change in the Soviet leader's attitude.¹⁰⁶ After a short conference with his top

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Bethell, Gomulka: His Poland, His Communism, p. 216.

¹⁰⁶ Zuraweski, Poland, The Captive Satellite, pp. 90-91. There are several versions of what happened while Khrushchev was gone and when he returned to the negotiation chamber. Some historians suggest that there never was a call from Chou En Lai. Shneiderman states that Khrushchev was led away from the conference table by Anastas Mikoyan. Mikoyan then spoke to the Soviet leader in a quiet voice for several minutes. After he was through, Khrushchev reportedly returned to the table with a broad smile. Given the highly charged emotional atmosphere of the negotiations, this is unlikely. See: Shneiderman, The Warsaw Heresy, p. 44.

military aides, Khrushchev ordered his divisions to withdraw to their garrison locations. The withdrawal was carefully monitored by patrols of Komar's KBW. Additionally, the Soviets announced that Rokossowski's future would indeed be decided by a vote of the 8th Plenum.¹⁰⁷ The Poles accepted this option. Further negotiations at the Belvedere Palace continued until the early morning hours. With mounting evidence before them, the Soviets were finally forced to conclude that Poland was not going to abandon communism and the Warsaw Pact by following its current path. It was this very assurance that the Soviets sought on their journey to Warsaw. Reasonably confident in their conclusions, Khrushchev and his delegation left Poland on October 20, 1956.¹⁰⁸

A few hours after Khrushchev's departure, Wladislaw Gomulka addressed the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party's 8th Plenum. In his speech, Gomulka promised changes to the economic, political, and social structure which had dominated Poland for the past decade. Although stating that there could not be a change in the basic (i.e., communist) philosophy which ruled the country, Gomulka spoke of a more humane socialism. This socialism would be one which respected individual rights based upon a realistic hope in the future and not on past errors and faulty planning. Gomulka stressed, as he had all along, that the (Communist) Party would "lead the nation to a realization of the best model of socialism."¹⁰⁹ Finally, Gomulka cautioned the young people of Poland to

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

restrain their "enthusiasms" because "reckless action would destroy everything that had been gained."¹¹⁰

Technically, the October Crisis ended on the 20th day of that month. The Soviet delegation departed as quickly and as mysteriously as they had initially arrived. Precisely why the Soviets left as they did is still unclear. There are several possible explanations: (1) The Soviets may have decided to play a waiting game with Gomulka's progressive government. (2) They were uncertain as to the long-range effects of the newly-surfaced Sino-Polish axis. (3) The decision had been made finally to accept Gomulka as First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party, or (4) the Soviets harbored a very real fear that hostilities could break out if compromise was not reached with the Poles. This fear of hostility was undoubtedly fueled by the unexpected and effective deployment of the Polish Internal Security Corps, the KBW.

Available documentation offers no hard evidence of precisely what happened to the KBW after the October Crisis of 1956. After negotiations at the Belvedere Palace were concluded, it is highly likely that the KBW maintained their defensive positions until the threat of Soviet attack was removed. Once the threat was removed, the defensive positions were probably turned over to the Polish Army. At that point, it is likely that all KBW units were recalled to their respective garrisons and stood down.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. The entire text of Gomulka's speech appeared in Trybuna Ludu, October 21, 1956. Also see: Syrop, Spring in October, pp. 98-110.

CONCLUSION

The October Crisis of 1956 had brought the KBW full circle in its development. The unit had experienced successful evolution from a uniformed security detachment formed to protect UB installations to an efficient and effective instrument of national policy. By the time of the October Crisis, the KBW was so well trained and disciplined that it stood ready to engage conventional Soviet forces in combat. When the October Crisis ended, the KBW emerged as an elite unit singularly capable of forcing the Soviet leadership to consider seriously alternative means to employing their own combat divisions in support of their foreign political decisions.

The decisive role of the KBW during the October crisis of 1956 signalled an honesty which was as refreshing as it was rare within the political lifeblood of a communist satellite government. In the case of communist Poland, this honesty reflected an ideological and institutional diversity that deviated from once mandatory Soviet dogmas. Due specifically to this diversity, the Polish government, through a marriage of ideology and KBW capability, was able to temper the Soviet reaction. Had this temperment gone unchecked, bloodshed would have been inevitable and Poland's intent to break from Soviet control might have led to far more serious confrontations.

Once the process of liberalization began, many Poles believed it could not be halted. This belief was founded in the popularity of one man - Wladislaw Gomulka. If Gomulka did not name Wacław Komar to head

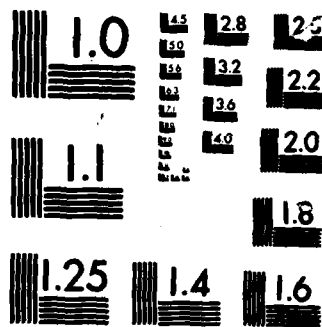
AD-A167 735 THE ROLE OF THE POLISH INTERNAL SECURITY CORPS IN THE 2/2
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the KBW, the October Crisis might have turned out differently. No one in the Kremlin anticipated Komar's appointment, just as no one in the Kremlin anticipated the Red Army would be threatened by a paramilitary force whose loyalty lay with Warsaw and not Moscow.

After Komar took command of the KBW, he assisted Gomulka by masterfully raising to consciousness a deeply rooted dissatisfaction with the Soviet occupation of Poland. Together with Gomulka and the KBW, this dissatisfaction was paramount in turning the tables on the Soviets. It was one of the few times in modern eastern European history where a previously despised arm of the secret state police evolved into an effective instrument of progressive political policy with the support of the public behind them. In its simplest form it was people ready to fight for home and country.

When the October Crisis ended, the KBW entered into the kind of low profile existence essential to the survival of such forces. In the eleven short years since its inception, the KBW proved itself unequalled in urban and rural guerrilla operations. That experience, combined with dedication, loyalty and honed to peak efficiency by October 1956, posed a significant threat to a major world power. It was that combination which allowed the KBW to face down the Soviet occupation Army of Poland - and win.

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4. Interviews

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